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"... give us the history we haven't had, make us the women we can't be":

Motherhood & History in Plays by Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems, 1976-1984

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Motherhood & History in Plays by Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems, 1976-1984

by

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Dissertation

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"We want to know how life feeds into art, not simply how art feeds on itself."

- Morris Dickstein, "Literary Theory and Historical Understanding" in *The Chronicle Review* 23 May 2003

"To talk about how things are out there in the world is not necessarily to imply that things are ever only one way or that such knowledge is transcendentally uncontaminated by interest and desire."

- Terry Eagleton, "Two Approaches in the Sociology of Literature," 1988

"Mr. Frank Grimshaw attacked the Equal Opportunities Commission for seeming 'to encourage mothers to return to work too early, to seek new careers, too 'fulfill' themselves professionally.'"

- *London Times* 27 May 1979

"'When the gods wish to punish us, they answer our prayers,' Oscar Wilde wrote. So it would seem to many of the women who looked forward to 'having it all.' The rigors of building careers, cultivating intimate relationships and caring for children have proved more difficult than anyone could have anticipated in the first heady days of feminism."

– *Newsweek* 31 March 1986

"'Those women who are at the top of their game could have had it all, children and career, if they wanted it,' suggests Pamela Madsen, executive director of the American Infertility Association (A.I.A.). 'The problem was, nobody told them the truth about their bodies.' And the truth is that even the very best fertility experts have found that the hands of the clock will not be moved."

– *Time* 15 April 2002

"I know a managing director who's got two children, she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone . . ."

- Marlene in *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill, 1982

"Of course you have to pretend it's all a drag. Well, hardly the fashion, is it? Kids."

- Dusa in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* by Pam Gems, 1976

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Preface

Morris Dickstein writes, "setting things in context is always worth doing. It helps us enlarge the picture . . . historical interpretation is an indispensable way of shedding light on culture and weighing the theories and practices through which it has always tried to make sense of itself" (B10). Because this dissertation is rooted in a similar belief, I would like to begin by establishing a context for the project itself.

I first read, in quick succession in 1993, all but one of the plays by Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems discussed in this dissertation, almost 20 years after their original writing, production, and publication. At the time, representations of mothers and the practice of mothering in these works, as well as the playwrights' examination of the ways in which, historically, women's biological capacity to reproduce has contributed to gender-based social stratification, leapt out at me quite forcefully (and still do). Because mothers in these plays do not figure as demons or angels, as the characters work against such types because the focus is not on the effects they have on their children but, instead, on the effects the job of mother has on them, I began to think about motherhood as a social issue in ways that I had not previously considered.

I believe that many people's understanding of theory comes from literature, performance, and other media; without reading theoretical texts, people process theory through other means. As James H. Kavanagh writes, "Ideology is a social process that works on and through every social subject, that, like any other social

process, everyone is 'in,' whether or not they 'know' or understand it" (311). Because at the time I had read very little feminist theory, the plays themselves were a significant part of my introduction to it, particularly socialist feminist theory, and these works helped me begin to define my own feminist position. Specifically, the plays drew my attention to how motherhood is a feminist issue because they made me look more closely at how the institution of motherhood is (and has been) culturally defined and how women negotiate those definitions, as well as how societies do or do not facilitate the practice of mothering.

Furthermore, these works inspired me to investigate the ways in which feminist theorists have (or have not) made room for mothers and mothering, and I found an extremely complicated and often contradictory range of views. As Patrice Diquinzio suggests, "Mothering is . . . a very contentious issue in American feminism . . . [which] has never been characterized by a monolithic position on mothering" (ix). Similarly, Brid Featherstone, considering not only American but also British feminism, writes, "From very early on . . . there were considerable battles in relation to the meaning of family or motherhood" (47). My own interests ultimately fell into two major categories: first, how, as Betty Friedan suggests, "The inequality of woman, her second-class status in society, was in historical reality linked to that biological state of motherhood" (*Second* 77), regardless of whether women do or do not, can or cannot, produce children; and second, how women's choices about balancing motherhood and work outside the home, engaging in private and public

lives, are affected by the social, religious, and legal structures that shape definitions of women and motherhood.

My own experience, unquestionably, is informed by being a U.S. citizen; as a result, although Churchill and Gems are British playwrights, my readings of their plays, and my interest in their approach to motherhood, cannot be separated entirely from cultural conversations about motherhood in the United States. As a result, my investigation of the cultural context out of which these plays grew includes a consideration of not only British but also American constructions of reproduction, mothers, and motherhood from a variety of sources. Popular images of mothers and motherhood cross cultural boundaries, as there is a regular exchange of ideas between these (and other) countries. As Sheila Rowbotham suggests, "national boundaries cannot contain the movement of feminist ideas" (xiii), and American and British Feminist movements of the 1970s unquestionably shared an exchange of ideas, though their approach to motherhood was different in some ways, a point I will investigate in subsequent chapters.

Additionally, most of the plays discussed have crossed national boundaries as both written and performed texts, and the playwrights have been interviewed and profiled in U.S. magazines such as *Vogue*, *Variety*, and *Ms.,* though Churchill (and her work) is better known to American audiences than Gems. I draw on the critical work American scholars, and, as there have been U.S. productions of most of the plays I am discussing, my analysis is often informed by production reviews written by

American critics. Lastly, I believe that the chapters show an increasing socio-political and cultural link between the U.S. and the UK from the early 1970s through the early 1980s, a link that is ultimately reflected in the content of the plays. The Thatcher/Reagan political/ideological front of the 1980s, for example, figures explicitly in Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982) and implicitly in Gems's *Loving Women* (1984).

Most overviews of Gems's work address her interest in the topic of motherhood; I believe, however, that her complex treatment of the subject deserves a more thorough investigation than it is usually afforded. On the other hand, motherhood rarely features in discussions of Churchill's work, though characters' complicated negotiations of motherhood figure quite significantly in several of her plays. (Though while I was engaged in the final revisions of this dissertation in May 2004, I came across a recently published work by Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990-2000* (2003), that devotes significant attention to themes connected to motherhood and family in several of Churchill's later plays.) In this dissertation, I aim to approach literature as an historical/cultural artifact that grew out of a specific time and place, "holding art and society together in the mind's eye . . . tracing the ways they inform and shape each other without in any simple sense being 'the same'" (Felski, *Literature* 22). In looking at selected plays that Churchill and Gems wrote between 1976 and 1984, I am interested in exploring how these works represent the intersections of gender and power as they relate to

constructions of motherhood, work, and feminism in the 1970s and 1980s.

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Introduction

In his review of Thea Sharrock's 2002 revival of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, 20 years after the play's premiere, Michael Billington writes that the "choice confronting Marlene between careerism and family responsibility now seems unduly stark" (19). The play may, thus, seem dated; *Top Girls* is a period piece, without question, located firmly in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, the "stark" choice is no less so at the beginning of the 21st century. Articles such as Lisa Belkin's "The Opt-Out Revolution," published in *The New York Times Magazine* in October 2003, Lisa O'Kelly's "It Beats Working," published in the *Guardian Review* in June 2004, and Marie Brenner's "Not Their Mothers' Choices," published in *Newsweek* in August 2001, all suggest that many of today's "top girls" in both the United States and Great Britain are choosing to stay at home with their children rather than trying to balance motherhood and careers, and address the ways in which little has changed socially or legally to accommodate the balancing act. As Max Stafford-Clark, who directed the original 1982 production of the play, noted in 1991, "the dilemma that's posed in the final scene between Joyce and Marlene, of a woman who opts to have a career and the woman who raises the child, is as pertinent today as it was ten years ago. I imagine that dilemma won't go away" (qtd. in Goodman, "Overlapping" 78).

Today, thirteen years after Stafford-Clark made that observation, the dilemma continues to exist for many women. Patrice Diquinzio writes, "The issue related to mothering that perhaps most widely engages U.S. political culture at the moment is

the difficulty many women, and a small but growing number of men, face in caring for children while also working for pay to provide financially for them" (249). Cultural conversations about conflicts between work and motherhood abound in newspapers, magazines, film, and on television, and these conversations are not limited to the United States. Ultimately, though the tenor of such conversations has surely changed with the changing times, the continuing pervasiveness of the topic suggests that workable solutions to the problems have not yet fully emerged.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Churchill and her contemporary Pam Gems wrote several plays in which they encourage their audiences to consider the status of women as it relates historically to their position as mothers, potential mothers, or non-mothers (by choice or not). In many of their works, Churchill and Gems challenge popular images of mothers and motherhood by focusing on the social, political, and economic effects of motherhood on women, rather than on the personal and psychological effects of mothers on their children; by constructing alternative histories both thematically and structurally in their plays; and by creating work that has been produced in both fringe and mainstream theatres and published as literary texts in both Britain and the United States.

In her introduction to *Literature After Feminism*, Rita Felski writes, "Unlike some of my colleagues, I see literary studies and cultural studies as related rather than opposed fields" (20). I believe the study of literature *is* a study of culture. As Stephen Greenblatt writes,

> [cultural] questions heighten our attention to the features of a literary work that we might not have noticed, and, above all, to connections among elements within the work. Eventually, a full cultural analysis will need to push beyond the boundaries of the text, to establish links between the text and values, institutions, and practices elsewhere in the culture. But these links cannot be a substitute for close reading. Cultural analysis has much to learn form scrupulous formal analysis of literary texts because those texts are not merely cultural by virtue of reference to the world beyond themselves; they are cultural by virtue of social values and contexts that they have themselves successfully absorbed. (226-227)

By engaging in close readings of the scripts and examining how they reflect, produce, and reproduce the culture out of which they grew, I aim to achieve a balance between cultural analysis and formal analysis of the literary texts.

I also feel, quite strongly, that literary criticism is a valuable exercise for both practitioners and scholars of theatre, and my understanding of the field of theatre studies includes readings of dramatic literature. I agree with Michelene Wandor's proposition that "no significant decisions about how to realise [sic] a play on stage can be made before the play is understood, and the source for that is the text, the cultural sources to which it refers, and then the text again" (*Post-War* 6). That is not to say, of course, that there is only one way in which a script can be understood;

rather, it is to say that the work of analyzing the written text is a critical step in the process of developing a performance product. Furthermore, because close readings of dramatic literature necessarily entail an understanding of performance, I read the plays with an eye toward how they would function in performance (ideally), though there is of course, no way to know.

Though I have chosen to limit my study to specific plays written between 1976 and 1984 because of the way the playwrights situate representations of mothers and motherhood within historical frameworks in those plays, motherhood figures in several other plays by Churchill and Gems from this period as well. For example, Churchill's *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* (1971), a radio play set in the future, the year 2010, presents a vision of an over-populated, over-polluted England in which couples must obtain licenses to have children, and unlicensed children are aborted according to government mandates. *Owners* (1972), in which a baby becomes a prop in a violent power struggle; *Traps* (1977), in which both real and imagined babies play a part in the construction of the literal and figurative traps in which the main characters find themselves caught; and *Fen* (1983), in which Val's conflict between her role as a mother and her desire to break free from her oppressive life is critical, all examine themes of responsibility and sacrifice (financial, psychological, and physical) as they relate to parenthood.

Because most of Gems's scripts from the 1970s and early 1980s remain unpublished, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment of how

motherhood features in these works; however, descriptions of plays such as *After Birthday* (1973), a monologue delivered by a "working-class girl who has just aborted" (Wandor, *Carry* 161), suggest that the intersections of class and gender as they relate to women's reproductive abilities surface in other works besides those discussed in this dissertation. Gems's first professionally produced play, *Betty's Wonderful Christmas* (1971), centers on "a depressed widowed mother [who is] living in great poverty with three children" in the 1920s (Gems, "Four" 195). The story turns into a fairytale, as Betty seeks out her Prince Charming, only to find him disappointing; the play ends with a revolution, after which Betty "is offered a place by the Lady of the Manor but prefers to live with her mother" (Gems, "Four" 195). As Gems notes, despite the fact that it was a children's play, "there was a sub-text for those who wanted to pick up on it" ("Four" 195), and the class issues which are implicit in the play continued to grow in Gems's plays throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Such themes certainly emerge in *Camille* (1984), a play in which Gems re-imagines Alexander Dumas *fils*'s heroine Marguerite Gautier as a mother,[1] and the choices she makes about work and motherhood reveal a complex network of calculated sacrifices that enable her to support herself and her child.

In her book *Lives Together, Worlds Apart: Mothers and Daughters in Popular Culture*, Suzanna Danuta Walters claims that "popular images both reflect and construct; they both *reproduce* existing mainstream ideologies and help *produce* those very ideologies" (11). In other words, cultural attitudes about mothers and

motherhood have both defined and been defined by media representations because they continually (re)construct familiar images of the mother, such as mother as idealized nurturer[2] and mother as destructive force.[3] Because these constructions depend directly on the children's relationship to their mothers, mothers in dramatic literature often function as supporting characters who act upon their protagonist children rather than as individuals who actively negotiate the challenges of motherhood.

The majority of Churchill's and Gems's plays that I will examine here focus on mothers as individuals, often without ever showing the children on stage at all. Of the plays discussed in the following chapters, only Churchill's *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine* show young children or adolescents as characters in relation to their mothers. It is important to note, however, that in both plays the "children" are played by adult actors, or represented by a doll, as Victoria is in act one of *Cloud Nine*. *Vinegar Tom* and *Cloud Nine* present relationships of adult children to their mothers: Alice and Joan in *Vinegar Tom*; Maud and Betty in act one and Betty and Edward and Vicky in act two of *Cloud Nine*. Gems's *Queen Christina* shows the child Christina with her father in the opening scene of the play; throughout the remainder of the play the adult Christina engages in a contentious relationship with her mother.

The plays of Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems offer provocative challenges to (and variations on) domestic realism and the aforementioned traditional representations of mothers as idealized nurturers or demonized destroyers. By

avoiding these stereotypical and archetypal representations of mothers, or by deliberately manipulating and subverting those stereotypes, Churchill and Gems allow their audiences to consider motherhood in various incarnations. Representations of mothers vary within their own plays; it is not that a new type is created, but that several different types appear in juxtaposition with one another. The characters in Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine*, and *Top Girls* and Gems's *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*, *Arthur & Guinevere, Queen Christina*, *Piaf*, and *Loving Women* share both common ground and marked differences in their experiences with motherhood.

As Catherine Itzin suggests in *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968*, "British theatre of 1968-1978 was primarily a theatre of political change," and the politics were rooted not only in the provocative content of plays but also in the rejection of and experimentation with traditional theatrical conventions, as well as the development of a strong "fringe" theatre movement which established new models, such as collectives, for theatrical production (x-xii). Churchill's and Gems's experimentation with form in plays written between 1976 and 1984, such as creating episodic, non-linear narratives, using ensemble casts, and integrating song and dance into their plays, ultimately challenges established models of theatrical representation, effectively reinforcing the plays' implicit critique of social structures by virtue of critiquing the very structure within which they are working. The presentation of history in non-naturalistic ways heightens the thematic connection between the past

and the present while simultaneously challenging traditions, both in history and in theatre, that have left out women.

Most of the plays that I examine in this dissertation have as their subject matter historical events or figures, fact-based subjects from a time before the period in which the plays were written. The playwrights do not present documentary accounts, and do not present work that purports to be a "realistic" account of events; there may be overt intermingling of the past with the present, as in the case of Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls*, or compressions of time and space, as in Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, and Gems's *Piaf* and *Queen Christina*. In *Twentieth-Century English History Plays: From Shaw to Bond*, Niloufer Harben states that

> Modern historical playwrights continually draw upon the present, which enables us to see history as knit into the fabric of our own time. The present is carried into the past as the past is sometimes carried into the future. Startling anachronisms are very much a part of the style of modern playwrights in their effort to drive home the connections between past and present . . . All we can know of the past is largely a subjective interpretation, and each observer rewrites history according to the bias of his own age. (255)

Churchill and Gems use their historical subjects as starting points for an examination of their own time and place, and they have clear contemporary political and social concerns that are rooted in the history that they represent on stage. Ultimately, the

historical context in which the plays were written and originally staged serves as a counterpoint for the historical subjects of the plays: women's equality was a significant topic in Great Britain (and other countries) as second wave feminism developed strength in the early 1970s; and the strong re-emergence of conservatism throughout the 1980s, specifically in England and the United States, bears on both the form and content of these playwrights' plays.

The socialist feminist movement that was emerging in Great Britain during the 1970s informs Churchill's and Gems's plays. In an interview with Linda Fitzsimmons, Caryl Churchill states, "I've constantly said that I am both a socialist and a feminist" (89). Gems, however, is less willing to be so labeled. She writes in "Imagination and Gender": "People constantly ask if, being a woman, you are a feminist. Do you write as a feminist (or as a socialist, or as a 'committed' writer)?. . . To be honest, I find the questions insulting" (148). Lest one be misled by Gems's statement, however, she also says, "I do not question the relevance of the word feminist to my work. The feminist outlook was my springboard" (qtd. in Goodman, *Contemporary* 17). I do not intend to imply that Churchill's and Gems's politics are exactly the same; they, clearly, are not. There are numerous points of departure that are evident not only in the content of their plays, but also in the structure and developmental processes of the plays, which will be examined in the following chapters. Nevertheless, both write from a socialist feminist perspective in a general sense of the term, and both have written plays that raise provocative

questions about the cultural position of mothers and the concept of motherhood.

The use of history is critical to the socialist feminist perspective that emerges in the works. In *Feminism and Theatre* Sue-Ellen Case writes,

> Rather than assuming that the experiences of women are induced by gender oppression from men or that liberation can be brought about by virtue of women's unique gender strengths, that patriarchy is everywhere and always the same and that all women are 'sisters,' the materialist position underscores the role of class and history in creating the oppression of women. From a materialist perspective, women's experiences cannot be understood outside of their specific historical context. (82)

By setting some of their plays in previous historical periods, Churchill and Gems allow connections between the past and the present to emerge; by treating the present as an historical moment in some of their plays, they encourage the audience to examine the immediate forces at work and their own role in the production of history. Furthermore, because many of the plays present tensions between the female characters, often in terms of sexual jealousy, these works disrupt notions of solidarity and universal sisterhood, emphasizing the complex intersections of feminist theories and women's realities.

In her book *The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Theatre of Empowerment*, Amelia Howe Kritzer says that

> Churchill's history plays function structurally, as well as thematically, to stimulate re-examination of past and present from the viewpoint of women and other groups who have been marginal or invisible in traditional historical accounts. (85)

Yet Kritzer categorizes only *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), and *Softcops* (written 1978, produced 1983) as "history plays," claiming that Churchill's later works, such as *Cloud Nine* (written 1978, produced 1979) and *Top Girls* (written 1980-82, produced 1982) treat history as a "subordinate theme." Other critics make similar arguments; for example, Richard H. Palmer states that although *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine* are about history and/or use history, they are not history plays in "any accepted use of the term" (151). Yet my readings of *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*, in chapters two and three, insist upon the centrality of history in these plays as well as in the two more conventionally historical plays from 1976.

Several of Gems's plays from 1976 to 1984 also use history as a means to explore contemporary society, often treating the present as an historical moment. Like Churchill's, some of Gems's works, such as *Piaf* (1978) and *Queen Christina* (1977), are easily categorized as history plays, whereas others, such as *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi* (1976) and *Loving Women* (1984), use history unconventionally but no less significantly. Lizbeth Goodman writes that Gems considers theatre to be an "art form in which political change can be effected directly, as in guerilla warfare" (*Contemporary* 221), and I believe her consistent examination of women's place in

history, particularly the ways in which social and political attitudes towards mothers and motherhood shape women's lives, contributes to the political nature of her work.

A key element of these works is the juxtaposition of historical and contemporary settings and characters, though those juxtapositions vary structurally and thematically from playwright to playwright, and from play to play. The intersections of past and present, public and private, in Churchill's and Gems's plays make the questions they raise about identity inextricably linked to history. And though the definition of motherhood is not transcendent, the ways in which history functions in these works suggest that certain problems that women face in relation to mothering do survive across centuries. In *The Reproduction of Mothering* Nancy Chodorow writes,

> The sex-gender system is continually changing . . . yet it stays the same in fundamental ways. It does not help us to deny the social and psychological rootedness of women's mothering nor the extent to which we participate, often in spite of our conscious intentions, in contemporary sex-gender arrangements. (215)

In my analyses of these plays, I do not intend to conflate the categories of "woman" and "mother," but I do believe the two are often conflated in terms of the ways in which those categories are defined culturally, socially, and politically. That seems to be a central part of the argument in Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* and *Light Shining in*

Buckinghamshire, for example; women's place in 17th century society was defined, in part, by their very ability to reproduce, connected to the Biblical story of Eve—the pain of labor as suffering for Eve's sin and carnality. Whether a woman is a mother (wants to be, doesn't want to be, etc.) does not matter; the (at least perceived) potential to reproduce marks women as different and woman/mother become conflated as a result. As Viola Klein writes in her 1957 study *Britain's Married Women Workers*, "Women's lives, today as much as ever, are dominated by their role—*actual or expected*—as wives and mothers" (qtd. in Thane 401, emphasis added).

According to Nancy Chodorow, "women's mothering is a central and defining feature of the social organization of gender" (9). Chodorow goes on to say that

> because of their child-care responsibilities, women's primary social location is domestic, [whereas] men find a primary social location in the public sphere . . . Men's location in the public sphere, then, defines society itself as masculine. It gives men power to create and enforce institutions of social and political control, important among these to control marriage as an institution that both expresses men's rights in women's sexual and reproductive capacities and reinforces these rights. (9)

Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* was originally published in 1978, at the same time Churchill and Gems were exploring these very issues in their lives and in their

work; the investigations of motherhood in both writers' plays is undoubtedly informed to some extent by their personal experiences as working mothers. Both women have addressed, at various times, the challenges that come with balancing motherhood and a career. Though Churchill says that, based on her mother's choices, she "had the feeling, rather early on, that having a career was in no way incompatible with staying married and being happy" (qtd. in Thurman 54), the mother of three also admits that the juggling act raises "nagging questions . . . of what's really important. Are plays more important than raising kids?" (qtd. in Keyssar 80). Similarly, Gems's attitudes about motherhood are informed by both her mother's experience as a widow raising three children in the 1920s, and her own as a married mother of four.

Both women note that they found the experience of staying at home to raise their children politicizing, particularly because they felt so isolated from the outside world. In 1977 Gems said, "Because I had a retarded child I was trapped in the maternal world so much longer and some feminism has become very attractive to me" (qtd. in McFerran 13). Churchill says, "I didn't really feel a part of what was happening in the sixties. During that time I felt isolated. I had small children and was having miscarriages. It was an extremely solitary life. What politicised me was being discontent with my own way of life—of being a barrister's wife and just being at home with small children" (qtd. in Itzin 279).

For women in Britain in the 1970s, according to Helene Keyssar, "the

framework of politics was class structure, and at least one obstacle in the women's movement was a clear understanding of the relationship between gender conflict and class conflict," differing from American women's experience because "it was and still is difficult for Americans to consider class conflict as central to politics and to their particular concerns as women" (16). Laurie Stone's interview with Churchill in *The Village Voice* in 1983 reflects this difficulty to a certain extent. Stone writes that Churchill's "critique of feminism doesn't work for [her]" because Marlene feeds certain stereotypes about "feminists as selfish exploiters," in part because she is "discredited" by Joyce, whose socialism trumps Marlene's capitalism in their debate in the final scene of the play (81). Churchill responds, after "wincing slightly," to Stone's suggestion that there are no "real feminists" in the play by saying, "'I quite deliberately left a hole in the play, rather than giving people a model of what they could be like. I meant the thing that is absent to have a presence in the play" (81). In the interview, and elsewhere, Churchill notes that *Top Girls* was "pushed on . . . by a visit to America about three years ago, where I met several women who were talking about how great it was that women were getting on so well now in American corporations . . . although that's certainly a part of feminism, it's not what I think is enough" (81). Thus, though Stone's definition of a "real feminist" is not clear, Churchill's own definition of feminism suggests the need for an attention to community that the brand of feminism that focuses on "women succeeding on the sort of capitalist ladder" often overlooks (Churchill, qtd. in Truss 8).

Churchill's and Gems's interest in motherhood has less to do with establishing a new gender hierarchy than with examining how women's reproduction acts as an additional factor in their material oppression. As Maggie Humm states, socialist feminism "argues that men have a specific material interest in the domination of women and that men construct a variety of institutional arrangements to perpetuate this domination" (213); by juxtaposing an historical past with the present in their plays, Churchill and Gems suggest that many "institutional arrangements" dictate the choices women have about motherhood, such as a lack of adequate day care options for working mothers, that either impede their ability to become workers in their society or forces them to relinquish the option of motherhood altogether. The difficulties in managing both spheres contribute to the ways in which women are often constrained by their culture's institutions.

In *After Brecht: British Epic Theatre,* Janelle Reinelt writes that the "postwar situation in Britain was hospitable to, or compatible with, epic theater practices, accommodating a space for political opposition in theatrical representation that produced a hybrid British form of recognizably Brechtian theater" (1). Churchill says that she was influenced by Brecht without knowing "either the plays or the theoretical writings in great detail" but, nevertheless, having "soaked up quite a lot about him over the years" (qtd. in Reinelt 86). Gems notes the complications inherent in assessing the legacy of Brecht's work, saying, "Despite what Brecht said (but didn't do) we proceed by empathy. And it's powerful" (qtd. in Betsko &

Koenig 208). Gems suggests that Brecht's theories did not always emerge in practice; it is difficult not to empathize with Mother Courage, for example. Gems goes on to say that "Brecht was a great entertainer . . . Politics, direct statements, belong on the platform not the stage" (208), addressing the fact that political theatre works through different means than what Gems refers to as "polemic"; theatre is most efficacious politically when it is entertaining theatrically.

Churchill expands on Brecht's suggestion that "perhaps the incidents portrayed . . . need to be familiar ones, in which case historical incidents would be the most immediately suitable" (56) by presenting histories that are both familiar and unfamiliar. For example, much of the history in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is one with which audiences may be unfamiliar, even today. As Churchill herself notes, her approach to the 17th century English Revolution is not limited to the standard Cavaliers/Roundheads struggle ("Light" i). Rather, she focuses on fringe groups who were also engaged in the revolution—the Diggers, Levellers, Ranters, Anabaptists—voices that had faded from history until a resurgence of interest in them emerged in the 1970s.[4] Nevertheless, familiar characters, such as Oliver Cromwell, appear in Churchill's play, and it may be argued that even if audiences are not familiar with the history of the Diggers, they know enough about Cromwell to identify the "winner" of the struggle before the play reaches its conclusion.

Several of Gems's plays also present histories that are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, particularly *Piaf* and *Queen Christina*. Discussing *Piaf*, Elaine Aston

says, "the iconic representation of the diminutive figure in the little black dress was critiqued in performance by the Brechtian-styled biographical narrative, pointing to the 'gap' between image and reality" ("Pam Gems" 162). The familiar image of Piaf, in her trademark costume, is thus disrupted by Gems's dramaturgical style. A key component of this disruption is in the choice of songs dictated by the script; Piaf's most famous songs are intentionally left out of the play. Many critics at the time complained about this choice. For example, Frank Rich, reviewing the American transfer of *Piaf* in 1981, writes that,

> Ms. Gems relies on that tired device of following most of Piaf's heartbreaks with songs that comment directly on the action. This might work if the song were Piaf's best, but the ones are generally lesser-known numbers that seem intended to minimize invidious comparisons between Miss Lapotaire's voice and her character's. (C3)

Rich does not consider the possibility that Gems chose the lesser-known songs for dramatic effect as a means to disrupt the traditional myth of Piaf by introducing a side of her history that is less familiar. As Helene Keyssar suggests, "too much nostalgia in the songs" would produce "too much nostalgia in the audience" (131). Furthermore, Gems herself notes, "people come primed with preconceptions. Some you play with and develop. Some you explode" (qtd. in Jahr 1). The absence of Piaf's most famous songs thus can be read as a device that Gems employs to work towards exploding the audience's preconceptions, as the history she presents is

simultaneously known and unknown.

It is significant that these playwrights combined Brecht's theories about historicization with feminist efforts in the 1970s to include women's voices in history and to "reclaim the history play from women's point of view" (Hanna 10-11). Feminist approaches to Brechtian dramaturgy, according to Reinelt, "foreground the ideological implications of representation with respect to gender assumptions, demystifying their apparent inevitability and appropriateness" (*After* 82). By experimenting with theatrical conventions; employing stereotypes to ultimately subvert them; and expanding the boundaries of the genre of the history play, Churchill and Gems critique the historical consistency with which the institution of motherhood has been manipulated as a means of controlling women. As a result, their art attempts to alter perceptions about mothers and motherhood that have been instituted and reinforced through law, social mores, and even art itself.

During the 1970s, a greater number of women were able to find and create opportunities to perform in, direct, write, and produce plays. Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems had both been writing plays since the 1960s, but neither had any stage plays professionally produced until 1971.[5] In an interview with Roland Rees, Gems states:

> It was an important time for women in theatre . . . When I think of what went before . . . we had the so-called 'Angry Young Men'—Wesker, Arden . . . But apart from Ann Jellicoe, Shelagh Delaney,

> where were the girls? As for the bourgeois theatre, there was Lillian Hellman in the States. Those years, we have been talking about [the late 1960s through the mid 1970s], were a window. People could do their own thing for a bit. (200)

In 1968, for example, Joan Plowright commissioned, with the backing of the National theatre, "four well-known female novelists to write one-act plays with entirely female casts" ("All Female" 8).[6] Groups such as the Women's Theatre Group and the Women's Company both emerged in 1973 after "Ed Berman, who ran the Almost Free Theatre in London, [invited women] to put on a season of plays by women writers" (Wandor, "Women" 60). By 1981, the Women's Playhouse Trust was established, according to Sue Dunderdale, to operate as "a theatre managed and financed by women . . . because we believe that too many plays are still being staged from an exclusively male point of view" (qtd. in Morley 13).

In their "Editors' Note" to "Part 3: The Question of the Canon" in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights* (2000), Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt say that Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems are playwrights who "would be widely considered canonical" (151-152). They argue that this canonical status and "endorse[ment] by the theatre academy" stems from such things as "strong production and publication records," noting that their plays are accessible in print, often anthologized (152-154). I have come across similar statistics in my own research on the work of Gems and Churchill: their plays have been produced by

prominent companies such as the RSC and the National Theatre; their work has enjoyed West End runs and Broadway and Off-Broadway transfers; their plays are included in collections such as the *Plays by Women* series published by Methuen; and they are named among the 7 females out of the 36 playwrights represented in *British Playwrights, 1956-1995: A Research and Production Sourcebook*, edited by William W. Demastes.[7]

Yet Gems is not as canonical as Caryl Churchill, despite her success in production and publishing, and many of Gems's early plays remain unpublished, limiting access to her body of work. Although in the 1970s and 1980s Gems was regarded as a prominent feminist playwright, a review of the literature in the field shows that by the mid 1990s her once-canonical position shifted. I am interested in exploring the ways in which both playwrights' work approaches similar subjects but elicits different responses. They both "break rules," creating works that push the boundaries of conventional dramas; they both stage history as a means of examining their own culture. And, as I argue in this dissertation, motherhood features significantly in many of their plays from the 1970s and 1980s.

Most of Churchill's scripts are easily obtained. Many of her plays are available in print individually in trade versions published by companies such as Nick Hern Books or TCG, or in acting editions published by Samuel French; they are also available in the Methuen World Dramatists Series as the collections *Plays: One, Plays: Two, and Plays: Three.* Furthermore, her plays *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, and *Vinegar Tom*

are included in popular drama anthologies such as *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*, St. Martin's Press's *Stages of Drama*, and *The McGraw-Hill Book of Drama*.

Gems's plays are not as accessible. Her work is not included in any of the aforementioned anthologies, and the only Gems-exclusive anthology, *Three Plays: Piaf, Camille, and Loving Women*, published by Penguin in 1985, is currently out of print, though a new collection called *Plays One: Pam Gems* is scheduled to be published by Oberon Books in July 2004, containing *Piaf*, *Camille*, and *Queen Christina*. Nick Hern Books carries some of her more recent plays (1995 to the present), several of which are adaptations of plays by Chekhov and Ibsen. According to their web sites, Samuel French USA offers acting editions of *Piaf* and *Camille*, and Samuel French London offers acting editions of *Camille* and *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*. The *Plays by Women* series published by Methuen in the 1980s, in which *Queen Christina*, *Aunt Mary*, and *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* appear in separate volumes, is difficult to purchase, most of the volumes being out of print. Ultimately, Gems's plays, particularly her pre-1990 works, are often more difficult to acquire than Churchill's.

As for success in production, three of Gems's plays have transferred to Broadway after successful West End runs—*Piaf* (1978), *Marlene* (1996), and *Stanley* (1997)--and one, *Aunt Mary* (1982), has played Off-Broadway. All three of the Broadway transfers have received Tony award nominations, with Jane Lapotaire winning the award for Lead Actress in a Play in 1981.[8] For Churchill, only *Serious Money* has had a Broadway run (for 21 previews and 15 performances), but 13 of her

plays have had Off-Broadway runs, some of them more than once.[9] She has won three Obies for playwriting,[10] and in 2001 won an Obie for "Sustained Achievement." Churchill the playwright and her plays are more well-known to American audiences, perhaps because of the countless college productions and the fact that her plays are more available in print, though Gems's *Dusa* has enjoyed several American college productions, and *Queen Christina* was produced at Tulane University as recently as 2001.

Aston and Reinelt note that both *Cloud Nine* and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* enjoyed successful revivals in England in 1997. *Top Girls* seems to re-emerge every 10 years, with major revivals in England in 1991 (Max Stafford-Clark directing again), and 2002 (directed by Thea Sharrock), as well as a BBC-Open University video production directed by Stafford-Clark in 1991.[11] There was an American revival of the play Off-Broadway in 1993 (10 years after its first Off-Broadway run).

Several of Gems's plays have also continued to be produced. Peter Hall directed a version of *Piaf* in London in 1993. The play was also produced in 2002 at the Theatre Royal in York, and Alfred Hickling's observation at the time that the play is "a casting director's nightmare" because the role of Piaf is so challenging for an actress/singer might explain the rarity of revivals of this particular play (even though in 2001 there was talk of Madonna performing the title role in a West End revival of the play). In 2003, there was an American production of *Piaf* by the

Potomac Theatre Project. The Absolute Theatre mounted a revival of *Queen Christina* in the 1990s that played in London and Eastern Europe. And *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* was chosen as a representative play for 1976 in the National Theatre's "NT2000: One Hundred Plays of the Century" Platforms series in 1999.[12] Nevertheless, Churchill's work is more widely produced.

Scholarly work dedicated to Gems and Churchill follows a similar pattern. According to the Dissertation Abstracts/Digital Dissertation Database, between 1974 and 2001 there were over forty dissertations or theses written about Caryl Churchill's work, about half of which are multi-playwright studies. There is only one title listed that covers Gems's work exclusively, and Gems's play *Queen Christina* figures in three multi-playwright studies.

There have been three full-length, single-author studies of Churchill's works published: Geraldine Cousin's *Churchill the Playwright* (1989), Amelia Howe Kritzer's *The Plays of Caryl Churchill* (1991), and Elaine Aston's *Caryl Churchill* (1997). Two essay collections dedicated to Churchill's work have also been published: *Caryl Churchill: A Casebook*, edited by Phyllis R. Randall (1988), and *Essays on Caryl Churchill: Contemporary Representations,* edited by Sheila Rabillard (1998). There is also a published sourcebook, the Methuen *File On Churchill* compiled by Linda Fitzsimmons (1989).[13] There are no published collections that address Gems's work exclusively, nor are there any Gems-specific sourcebooks available.

Several histories of 20th century British theatre include biographical and

professional information about both playwrights and help to establish their place in theatre history. Christopher Innes's *Modern British Drama: 1890-1990* (1992) and its revised edition, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (2002), offer an interesting example of how Gems's status has diminished while Churchill's has solidified. In the 1992 edition, chapter 7, "Present Tense—Feminist Theatre," provides two subsections, one on Gems, the other on Churchill. They are the final chapters in the book. Thus, Innes helps construct what Aston and Reinelt argue is Gems and Churchill's canonical position by holding them out as Britain's two prime examples of feminist playwrights. As Aston notes in *An Introduction to Feminism & Theatre* (1995), "Innes's own emphasis is on the feminist playwrights (though he treats only two: Gems and Churchill), which reflects a traditional academic approach to theatre which prioritizes the dramatic at the expense of the theatrical" (57). Innes also prioritizes these two writers because several of their works were produced by mainstream theatres such as the RSC and the Royal Court.

Ten years later, however, their positions have shifted within Innes's text. His discussion of Gems now appears in chapter 3, in a section called "The Feminist Alternative," in which he continues to link Gems and Churchill as the two most representative British feminist playwrights of the 1970s and 1980s, saying "during the late 1970s there were just two women-writers whose work became an important and influential part of the general repertoire: Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems" (236). Innes goes on to analyze many of Gems's plays, including some from the late 1990s,

but his readings suggest that Gems has but one point to make: "almost all of Gems's . . . work qualifies as 'uterine' drama—her description of *Queen Christina*—where the Naturalism implied by this biological focus is consistently modified by structures that represent a 'female' approach" (248). Though motherhood does figure prominently in almost all of Gems's plays, there has been variation on that theme in works that span thirty years. In the following chapters, I contend that Gems has adapted her approach, in terms of both form and content, to the subjects of motherhood, family, feminism, and socialism in relation to the prevailing cultural attitudes of the specific periods in which they were originally produced.

Innes examines Churchill's work specifically in chapter 5, in a new section called "Poetic Drama," followed by a subsection on Sarah Kane. He links Churchill's increasing experimentation with form, the "open surrealism" of her later plays, such as *The Skriker*, with Kane's "poetry of madness" (529). He writes, "taken together these [plays by Kane and Churchill] mark a new development in feminist drama at the end of the millennium" (529). Thus, though he maintains the long-standing "Gems and Churchill" example of second wave feminist playwriting, he also allows Churchill and her plays to expand beyond that realm into a newer one. (Though he also establishes a new coupling of "representative" feminist playwrights in Churchill and Kane.)

The pairing of Gems and Churchill surfaces in other histories of contemporary British drama as well. Dominic Shellard's *British Theatre Since the War*

(1999) provides a wide-ranging overview of fifty years of British theatre. In the "Female Playwrights" subsection of his "1969-1979" chapter he writes, "Even the early and justifiable commercial success of playwrights such as Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems proved a double-edged sword in that it obscured for some the imperative of continually demanding that women receive the same encouragement and access to venues as men" (156). Because Gems and Churchill are the only two playwrights whose work Shellard discusses in the section, he ultimately reproduces the common coupling and positions them as canonical. Shellard includes four of Churchill's plays in the "Table of Significant Events" provided at the beginning of the book,[14] and three of her plays are discussed in the "1980-1997" section of the book as well. There is no mention of Gems's work after 1979.

Histories of British theatre that were written and published in the 1970s and 1980s inform both my readings of the plays and my investigation of the ways in which these playwrights have been constructed as representative (or not) of feminist and political dramatists. I am particularly interested in these histories because of their contemporaneousness; the ways in which the playwrights were critiqued in the period in which these plays were originally written and produced provides insight into how they have been received in subsequent periods.

For example, Catherine Itzin's *Stages in the Revolution* (1980), a history that was written and published during the period that I examine in the dissertation, focuses specifically on "political theatre." Her view that Gems is "not so much a socialist

writer as one concerned with sexual politics" (290) and her observation that *Dusa* received "(*mostly male*) critical acclaim" (291, emphasis added), serve in some ways to dismiss Gems as a political, or a feminist, writer. In contrast, Itzin devotes a subdivision to Churchill's work in the chapter "1976," where she notes that "if political commitment is measured by the adage of actions speaking louder than words, then Churchill rated high. Not just with the content of her stage plays, but with the stances she took" (279-280). Itzin's statement informs the common view of Churchill as a highly political playwright. Her claim that "*Vinegar Tom* and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* marked Churchill's departure from the expression of personal anger and pain to the expression of a public political perspective, which was itself the source of anger and pain" (285), leads me to wonder if Itzin is partially responsible for setting up Churchill as the political writer and Gems as the personal. Yet Gems's works often reflect, and occasionally interrogate, the "personal is political" philosophy that is commonly associated with feminist ideology.

In *Feminist Theatre* (1984), on the other hand, Helene Keyssar makes a point of emphasizing the political nature of Gems's work, noting that many of Gems's "dramaturgical choices . . . can be seen as deliberate political decisions" in the context of feminist theatre (131), thus allowing Gems's work to be read as political as well. Keyssar, like Itzin, also emphasizes Churchill's politics (the chapter is called "The Dramas of Caryl Churchill: The Politics of Possibility") in her discussions of almost all of Churchill's plays from 1973 through 1982. Such analyses have

contributed to the construction of Churchill and Gems as feminist-socialist playwrights to varying degrees.

Michelene Wandor's *Carry On, Understudies!* (1986), a self-described "critical history of the relationship between theatre, class and gender" (xv), is a useful source for a general history of both playwrights' early careers, as Wandor provides the titles of plays, along with dates and locations of original productions. Wandor also provides analyses of several plays by both playwrights. Like Itzin, she argues that "the socialist-feminist dynamic has little place" in Gems's plays (166). Her readings of Churchill's plays do not locate Churchill as neatly, as Wandor reads some of the plays as radical feminist, some as socialist feminist, and some as bourgeois feminist (*Top Girls*). Wandor's study is among the earliest studies that treat the work of these playwrights, and undoubtedly has exerted some influence on interpretations of their work, even if Lizbeth Goodman was calling the work "somewhat dated" as early as 1993 (*Contemporary* 9).

Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), a history/overview of feminist theory and feminist theatre, includes discussions of Gems's *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* and Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, and *Vinegar Tom*. Case provides useful definitions of the various strains of feminism, as American feminist scholars perceived them in the late 1980s, which help me examine Churchill and Gems's work through a materialist feminist lens. My definitions of feminism are also informed by Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988), Gayle Austin's *Feminist Theories for*

Dramatic Criticism (1990) and Maggie Humm's *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (1990).

In *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (1993) Lizbeth Goodman argues that

> very little feminist theatre has entered the canon, except on a few reading lists in 'gender and performance' courses. Very few feminist plays have been produced in London's West End or New York's Broadway circuits, though there are a few notable exceptions. Neither academic nor commercial measures of value have judged feminist theatre to be 'suitable' for inclusion. The few Churchill and Gems plays which are occasionally embraced according to both commercial and academic values may be seen as the exceptions which prove the rule. (27)

Goodman does not discuss any of Gems's plays specifically in her text, but she does analyze nine of Churchill's scripts. Thus, by 1993, it appears that Gems's work was, in some ways, beginning to be eliminated from key discussions of feminist theatre.

Elaine Aston's *An Introduction to Feminism & Theatre* (1995) mentions Gems only insofar as to discuss Innes's history discussed above. Her investigation of Churchill's work is limited to four plays: *Cloud Nine*, *Vinegar Tom*, *Fen*, and *Top Girls*. In some ways, Aston, then, reinforces these four plays as Churchill's canonical works. (As noted earlier, *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, and *Vinegar Tom* are the plays by Churchill most often found in drama anthologies. And as they are three of the plays

that I examine in this dissertation, I'm doing it, too.) Like Goodman, she de-emphasizes Gems's position by not addressing any of the plays specifically, and thus contributes to the shift in Gems's once-canonical status.

Janelle Reinelt's essays "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama" (1986) and "Caryl Churchill and the Politics of Style" (2000) offer important observations about Churchill's use of history (and the Brechtian influence). The earlier essay focuses primarily on *Vinegar Tom*, while the latter provides an overview of Churchill's career. Similarly, her book *After Brecht* (1996) examines the influence of Brecht's theories and "dramaturgical concepts," specifically "gestus, epic structure, and historicization," on contemporary British drama (8). She devotes a chapter to Churchill's work, providing in-depth readings of plays from the 1980s and 1990s (post-*Top Girls*). She notes that Pam Gems has "developed work within a socialist feminist framework, but [that] it is Caryl Churchill who most consistently and forcefully writes from this perspective" (82). Though I agree with Reinelt's argument, and I am much influenced by her readings of Churchill's plays, I am also interested in how Brechtian theories inform Gems's plays, and I attempt to explore those possibilities in the following chapters.

Ruby Cohn's *Retreats from Realism in Recent English Drama* (1991) also provides an overview of British playwrights' use of history, and she offers specific readings of *Cloud Nine* and *Queen Christina* that serve to inform my readings of the construction of Gems and Churchill as playwrights more than they do my readings of the plays

themselves. Cohn says that "most of [Gems's] work adheres to the conventions of realism, with emphasis on women's problems" (9); of Churchill she says, "not attracted to realism, she has attained fame with the imaginative leaps of *Cloud* 9, *Top Girls*, *Fen*, and *Serious Money* . . ." (12). Cohn's reading of Gems as a realist is not uncommon. There is little written about Gems's application of Brechtian techniques, though I think it emerges in her use of music, episodic structure, and social gest in plays such as *Dusa*, *Piaf*, and *Queen Christina*. Also, many of Gems's plays require that actors play multiple characters, something which in Churchill's plays is cited as an example of Brechtian alienation (see Reinelt, *After Brecht* 88-91). Admittedly, cross-casting does not always produce an A-effect. In chapter three, however, I address the ways in which Gems uses this technique, in *Piaf* and *Queen Christina,* to suggest the fluidity of the identities of the people who shape the protagonists' lives in order to draw attention more directly to the process of the protagonists' own development specifically and the construction of identity in general.

Many scholars have written about Caryl Churchill's provocative use of history as a tool to critique contemporary culture. Alisa Solomon's "Witches, Ranters and the Middle Class: The Plays of Caryl Churchill" (1981) is a particularly important article for me because Solomon wrote it at a time when Churchill and her plays were basically unknown in the United States. Her discussions of *Vinegar Tom* and *Light Shining* emphasize Churchill's use of history to critique contemporary society, as well

as Churchill's application of Brecht's theories. Interestingly, Solomon praises *Light Shining* more highly than *Vinegar Tom* (which isn't uncommon for the period—see Wandor and Coveney, for example), noting that *Light Shining* is a stronger play structurally because it allows its "contemporaneity [to evolve] vividly out of its imaginative world" without the kinds of temporal disruptions employed in *Vinegar Tom* (53). Yet, as mentioned earlier, *Vinegar Tom* has proved to be the more widely-produced of the two, and is often read as more "feminist" while *Light Shining* is considered more "socialist." In chapter two, I address these labels as they relate to the plays.

Though *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* is discussed in many of the overviews of Churchill's plays, there are very few studies devoted to it exclusively. Meenakshi Ponnuswami's "Fanshen in the English Revolution: Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*" (1998) provides an interesting analysis of the play's approach to history, though I do not agree with her claim that Churchill abandons "social history and realism" after 1976 (41), a point I address in chapter four. The essay contains a very brief discussion of the characters' experiences with motherhood, primarily in a footnote.

Michael Swanson's "Mother/Daughter Relationships in Three Plays by Caryl Churchill" (1986) provides one of the few discussions of *Cloud Nine's* Maud, a character who is central to my reading of Churchill's representations of motherhood in this particular play. Swanson's analysis of both *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* focuses

on the mother-daughter relationships in the plays; in chapter three, I focus on the effects of motherhood on the individual, the person whose choices and options (including those about motherhood) are defined by society's attitudes towards the institution of motherhood, which in *Cloud Nine* are sometimes directly affected by daughter's attitudes towards their mothers.

Much of the scholarship dedicated to *Cloud Nine* focuses on the play's exploration of themes related to gender and sexuality. Essays such as Elin Diamond's "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras" (1985), Apollo Amoko's "Casting Aside Colonial Occupation: Intersections of Race, Sex, and Gender in *Cloud Nine* and *Cloud Nine* Criticism" (1999), and John M. Clum's "'The Work of Culture': *Cloud Nine* and Sex/Gender Theory" (1988), along with others, offer provocative readings of the play. My own analysis of the play is certainly informed by such sources, but my investigation of the mother identity of the characters, I hope, provides something new to contribute to the discussion. In chapter three, I address the ways in which Maud, Victoria (act two), and Edward (in both acts) all wear motherhood differently. The juxtaposition of the various kinds of mothers, as well as Betty's growth as a person (who happens to be a mother), contributes to the play's attempts at exploding myths about socially defined gender roles, sometimes by presenting characters who embody those myths.

Susan Bennett's "Growing Up on *Cloud Nine*: Gender, Sexuality, and Farce"

(1998) traces Bennett's personal engagement with the play over the course of fifteen years. Her assessment of the play within various contexts is especially important to me in its observations about the cross-cultural life of the play. For example, all of the productions I have seen of the play have been mounted by university theatres in the United States; accordingly, these productions have used the American acting edition of the script, which contains the key structural change of shifting the position of Betty's final monologue. Bennett notes that this change "is particularly interesting: the adoption of a discourse of American feminism (self-discovery/knowledge) realigned Churchill's materialist critique to address a targeted audience in terms that would meet an American, rather than British, horizon of expectations" by making the play "Betty's story" and offering the audience "a central character whom they might relate to" (32). My own reading of *Cloud Nine* is informed by this central placement of Betty, though my examination of the script does consider the various other print versions of the script as well. Furthermore, I think it is possible for an audience to come away with an understanding of the "materialist critique" inherent in the script by examining Betty in relation to the other mother characters, particularly Maud and Lin, in the script.

Much has been written about *Top* Girls as well. Essays such as Joseph Marohl's "De-Realised Women: Performance and Identity in *Top Girls*" (1987) and Christiane Bimberg's "Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* as Contributions to a Definition of Culture" (1997-98) provide

analyses of Marlene's adoption of "male behaviour" in order to achieve her professional goals that relate to my reading of Marlene's choices about her role as a mother and the consequences of those choices. Michael Evenden's analysis of the reciprocity of *Top Girls'* structure and content, in his essay "No Future Without Marx," informs my own reading of Churchill's use of the present as history in this play. Evenden suggests that in *Top Girls* Churchill creates a kind of "temporal stasis," suggesting that the possibility of historical change has ended for the characters, creating an "historical deadlock" (105). Conversely, in her essay "'I won't turn back for you or anyone': Caryl Churchill's Socialist-Feminist Theatre" (1987), Linda Fitzsimmons suggests that Churchill "advocates change and suggests a way forward" in the play (19). While I agree that Churchill advocates change, I find the "way forward" is a little harder to pick out of the wreckage that exists at the end of the play. Fitzsimmons' essay also offers crucial arguments about "the ideal of motherhood as a political issue" (19), and her reading informs my own reading of the text.

Critical essays on Gems's work are more scarce. Elaine Aston's "Pam Gems: Body Politics and Biography" (2000), Sarah J. Rudolph's entry on Gems in *British Playwrights, 1956-1995: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (1996), and Michelene Wandor's entry on Gems in the 4th edition of *Contemporary Dramatists* (1988) all provide extremely useful overviews of Gems's life and work.

In her dissertation *Revisioning Women's Lives Through Drama: The Plays of Pam*

Gems, Sarah J. Rudolph examines the ways in which Gems "shap[es] biography for the stage," focusing on *Piaf*, *Queen Christina*, and *Camille* specifically (2). Though Rudolph presents a reading of *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* that is in many ways close to my own reading, especially in its emphasis on the Rosa Luxemburg monologue, her primary focus is on the construction of history/biography in other plays and Gems's exploration of gender roles in these works. For example, Edith Piaf's role as a mother is mentioned only briefly in Rudolph's discussion of Gems' *Piaf*, as it is not central to the scope of her project. In chapter three, my reading of *Piaf* directly questions Piaf's mother identity and its effects on her life and career as presented in the play. It is virtually impossible to discuss *Queen Christina* without discussing motherhood, but the focus is typically on Christina's experience as a woman raised as a man who rejects all things society deems feminine but then discovers (too late) that she has missed an opportunity by rejecting motherhood. Though I, of course, examine Christina's predicament, I also examine how Gems manipulates common stereotypes about mothers through the character of Christina's mother. Furthermore, because I focus on Gems's use of history in a broader sense than biography, I examine two plays that are not biographies (but are histories, albeit unconventional ones): *Arthur & Guinevere* and *Loving Women*, plays which Rudolph also discusses briefly.

My dissertation also draws on studies of the British history play. Niloufer Harben's *Twentieth-Century English History Plays: From Shaw to Bond* (1988) provides

useful definitions of history plays, though he offers no discussion of any works by Gems or Churchill. Nevertheless, his discussions have helped me define my arguments about Churchill's and Gems's use of history in their plays. D. Keith Peacock's *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama* (1991) and Richard H. Palmer's *The Contemporary British History Play* (1998) also attempt to define the term history play, and both discuss the works of Gems and Churchill. Each devotes some space to *Queen Christina*, and Palmer addresses *Piaf* as well. More emphasis is placed on Churchill as a writer of history plays, with brief discussions of *Light Shining* and *Vinegar Tom* in each work, and more thorough analyses of *Top Girls*. Both authors argue that history features only in the first scene of *Top Girls*. According to Palmer, "the second half of the play presents a conventionally structured domestic melodrama, set in the present and involving only the modern character from the symposium [Marlene]" (196). In chapter three I address several readings of *Top Girls* that make similar arguments about Churchill's use of history in *Top Girls*, and I provide my own arguments for why *Top Girls* is a history play, rather than one that simply "uses" history.

Gems's work is typically discussed as "biography" rather than "history," a subtle, though important, distinction. True, many of Gems's plays are biographies in that they focus on one person, a real-life figure, but they are also, therefore, historical. I contend that plays like *Loving Women*, centered on wholly fictional characters, or *Arthur & Guinevere*, featuring characters who play the leads in the most

popular mythological history of England, also serve as history plays. Churchill's history plays seem to be regarded as somehow more substantial because they focus on larger communities and events, and, therefore, a larger history. For example, Janelle Reinelt writes,

> At a time in the 1970s when many feminist explorations in theatre, literature, and life were preoccupied with personal experience, represented often in realistic terms, Churchill was resilient in developing a social, multivalenced approach to representing women's experiences. Using an epic dramaturgy many have linked to Brecht, Churchill placed her characters as social subjects at the intersection of economic, religious, and political forces which disciplined their sexuality and prescribed their gender. ("CC style" 175)

In an interview with Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, Churchill notes that her writing is influenced by "a tradition of looking at the larger context of groups of people. It doesn't mean you don't look at families or individuals within that, but you are also looking at bigger things" (78). Yet Gems's works, though often focused on an individual, also consider the larger context, examining the forces that shape the lives of those individuals who are at the center of her plays.

My dissertation also draws on works that are not specifically about Gems, Churchill, or even theatre. For example, Antoinette Burton's "'History' is Now: Feminist Theory and the Production of Historical Feminisms" (1992), an essay about

feminist practitioners across various disciplines, raises interesting questions about the production of history. Her essay informs not only my inquiries into how Gems and Churchill use history in their plays to challenge/revise history but also into how critics and historians who constructed histories of British theatre (socialist, feminist, etc.) in the same period in which Gems and Churchill's works were originally produced (late 1970s/early 1980s) construct the writers' place in theatre history.

I have focused on media representations of mothers, motherhood, and work in popular culture outside of the theatre (i.e., magazines, television, news) from the 1970s to the present, as these materials directly inform my analyses of Gems's and Churchill's plays from the 1970s and 1980s, and my own experience as a feminist, and a mother, in the present. Furthermore, many of the plays that I examine in the following chapters reflect an awareness, and a critique, of such representations. Many of the issues the playwrights explore relate explicitly to the ways in which feminism, work, and motherhood were represented in newspapers and magazines at the time.

Popular magazines such as *Ms.*, *Vogue*, *Redbook*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *People*, and *Harper's Bazaar* inform my discussions of media constructions of mothers and motherhood. Current events periodicals such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Spare Rib*, as well as newspaper articles from *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times* provide useful information about not only social perceptions of mothers in both Great Britain and the United States but also articles about relevant legislation about

such things as employment, daycare, and reproductive issues such as birth control and abortion. These sources also offer insight into the general socio-political climate of the periods I am investigating.

Rita Felski writes, "Literature is one of the cultural languages through which we make sense of the world; it helps to create our sense of reality rather than simply reflecting it. At the same time, it also draws on, echoes, modifies, and bounces off our other frameworks of sense-making. No text is an island" (*Literature* 13). In many of their plays written between 1976 and 1984, Churchill and Gems deliberately refer to their own time and place by connecting it, implicitly or explicitly, to the historical periods represented in the plays; they even go so far as to treat the present as an historical moment by the 1980s. As a result, reflection, representation, and construction intermingle. Clearly, in these works, history does not equal documentary or truth, even though the playwrights occasionally use documentary material, such as transcripts, pamphlets, and other sources to act as dialogue. In some ways, literary texts become history, perhaps most fully realized in Churchill's *Top Girls*, a play in which several characters are borrowed from literature and even paintings. In this way, the plays ultimately become the kinds of historical artifacts that Churchill and Gems use in their works, producing a *mise-en-abyme* effect: literature is history as the plays themselves are examples of literature as history.

In his review of *Queen Christina* in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1977, John Barber writes, "Pam Gems is unique. She is the only English playwright concerned with the

role of women in society" (qtd. in Gems, *Queen* 80). Though Barber overstates his case, for there is no question that several other English playwrights during this period wrote plays that were concerned with the role of women in society, Gems's examination of women's roles is distinct in its approach, primarily because of the biographical portraits she produced from the 1970s to the 1990s, described by Elaine Aston as a "revisionist style of biographical theatre" ("Pam Gems" 157). In some ways, Gems's insistence on the centrality of motherhood to women's identities, not only in her plays but also in interviews and essays, implies a biological imperative that can be alienating for some and affirming for others. Yet her consistent examination of the ways in which motherhood relates specifically to questions of power as it is socially, rather than biologically, designated, makes her emphasis on the subject more complex than a simple valorization of maternity or a narrowly essentialist form of feminism.

Though Michelene Wandor writes that motherhood " is a role rather than a relationship for . . . Churchill, [and] merits only a passing reference in plays by Gems" and that the family "doesn't appear at all" in Gems's plays (*Look* 152),[15] I believe that both playwrights, particularly in their works from the 1970s and early 1980s, weave provocative questions about motherhood into their broader examinations of the intersections of class, gender, power, and history. For example, in her plays *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Vinegar Tom*, *Cloud Nine*, and *Top Girls*, the juxtaposition of the past and the present highlights the ways in which the roles of

mothers and the institution of motherhood construct and are constructed by the cultures Churchill examines. Furthermore, several of their plays, such as Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and Gems's *Loving Women*, imagine reconfigurations of the traditional family unit, often by suggesting that the practice of mothering need not be an exclusively female endeavor, nor need it be solely the province of women who have borne children.

Chapter 1

Motherhood & Labor: Cultural and Literary Reflections

One of the most pervasive cultural conversations about motherhood in Western societies today centers on the conflict between having children and having a career outside the home. For many, it is a foregone conclusion that these two worlds, domestic and public, are in direct, irreconcilable conflict. Of course, there are economic, legal, and ideological factors that are specific to various times and places, but the fundamental problem of the mother/worker challenge is not a new one, yet each generation seems to spin it as if it were unique to its own time. As Sarah Blaffer Hrdy writes, "though the world has undergone immense changes . . . many of the basic outlines of the dilemmas mothers confront remain remarkably constant" (xiii), dilemmas such as the imposition on "women painful choices no man need ever make: her aspirations versus her infant's well-being; vocation *or* reproduction" (490). Often by reducing motherhood to a concept that takes on a symbolic function in the rhetoric of campaigns for and against women's equality, politicians, reporters, theorists and activists, shift the focus away from the practical realities of reproduction and mothering and their effect on women's material existence.

For example, though *The Boston Herald's* conservative Op-Ed columnist Don Feder derides working mothers for putting their children into daycare in order to pursue their careers (July 2001), the very real fact is that many women, even those in two-income households, cannot afford to stay at home full-time with their children,

even if they would like to do so. Conversely, many women who would like to work, and even those who need to work to support their families, "are prevented by high childcare costs or lack of appropriate provision" (Ward n.p.). Furthermore, claims such as those made by Feder, that children suffer from the "toxic" effects of daycare because they cannot form what he argues is "the most important attachment of [their lives]—bonding with their mothers" ("Devoted" 31), have been challenged by studies that "have consistently demonstrated that a child's social or academic competence does not depend on whether a mother is employed" (Gerson n.p.).

In 2002 American (British-born) economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett published a book about the motherhood/career conflict that caused a minor stir, despite the fact that it did not sell "particularly well" and the book was characterized as a "miserable read for childless women, and irrelevant to everybody else" (Overington 5). *Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children*,[16] focuses on the "creeping non-choice" of childlessness that many American women face (Gibbs 50). In her review of Hewlett's book, Jackie Ashley writes in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, "Research done in America, but thought to apply to Britain too, shows that 42% of high-salary women are childless, and the figure rises as you go up the income scale. But only 14% said they had definitely not wanted children. Babies have become the new frontline in feminist politics" (1).

Yet I would argue that babies have never been far from the frontline of feminist politics. Hewlett herself put babies on the frontline over fifteen years ago

with a work that started from the same premise as her 2002 "shocker." Her 1986 book *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* caused controversy in its day, raising the ire of feminists by arguing that "the chic liberal women of NOW have mostly failed to understand that millions of American women like being mothers and want to strengthen, not weaken, the traditional family structure" (Leo 63). While it may be true that millions of women like being mothers, it does not necessarily follow that they want to strengthen the "traditional family structure," and by equating the two, rather than seeking new ways to imagine the family structure, such a definition of motherhood necessarily entails forgoing work outside of the home and reproduces gender inequality.

Furthermore, this debate has never been limited to second wave feminism. Even in the 19th century the mother/worker debate was a hot topic for feminists and anti-feminists alike, and people on both ends of the political spectrum used a constructed concept of motherhood to further their agendas. For example, the highly idealized definition of mothers as "the repository of all that was decent and good" (Thurer 182) was manipulated to suggest that women should not aspire to move beyond their designated place, reinforcing ideas about "traditional" roles; in such cases, pro-mother becomes pro-family, and the emphasis is not on the individual women who are mothers but on their function as mothers in relation to children and husbands.

For example, in the *Lowell Offering* (1840-1845), a literary magazine that

published writing by female mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, in the 19th century, a woman named Ella writes,

> that physical difference which, in one state of society, makes woman the slave of man, in another makes him her worshipper . . . Woman must be the mother . . . in that station where woman is most herself, where her predominating qualities have the fullest scope, there she is most influential, and most truly worthy of respect. But when she steps from her allotted path into that of the other sex, she betrays her inferiority. (qtd. in Dublin 129-130)

In this case, the author is (ostensibly) a mill worker, and her intended audience is largely working class and female. By suggesting to an audience of mill workers, often young, single women, that working women "betray [their] inferiority" by stepping outside the home, the author's goal seems to be to encourage these young women to pursue a path that will lead to marriage and motherhood rather than to aspire to move beyond mill work into more profitable public careers.

The opposing side of this debate appeared in similar literary venues at the time, challenging the idea that women are not naturally inclined to engage in public activities, be it work or politics. Huldah Stone writes in "An Operative," published in *The Voice of Industry* (1846/47),

> Woman is never thought to be out of her *sphere*, at home; in the nursery, in the kitchen, over a hot stove . . . But let her step out, plead

> the cause of right and humanity, plead the wrongs of her slave sister of the South or of the operative of the North, or even attempt to teach the science of Physiology, and a cry is raised against her, '*out of her sphere.*'" (qtd. in Dublin 127)

Stone also writes for a working class audience, but her goal is to inspire women to challenge the double standard that keeps them confined to the domestic sphere. Because her audience is largely mill workers, one can assume that the women she hopes to reach are ones who need to work to survive and who face particular challenges in balancing work outside the home and motherhood. Maxine Margolis writes, "That economic necessity was the primary factor leading married women to seek employment is illustrated by the fact that in 1890 more widows than wives were employed outside the home" (201). For many working-class women, for whom the combination of motherhood and work outside the home creates additional financial, physical, and emotional burdens, the popular construction of motherhood as a woman's sacred calling was, and still is, an unattainable ideal. As Margolis notes, "Only middle and upper class families could hope to conform to the depiction of the mother role in the advice manuals" of the time (45).

Such notions about "sacred motherhood" are called into question in *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, a collection of letters written by British working-class women between 1913 and 1914 at the request of Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the General Secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild, an organization that was

initially devised to "spread a knowledge of the advantages of Co-operation" but evolved into one that actively lobbied for women's rights in areas such as divorce reform and maternity benefits (Gordon vi-ix). The collection was originally published in 1915, and it was re-published in 1978, when, according to Linda Gordon, "inherent in these letters are the bases of two campaigns still current in the women's movement: the proposal that domestic labor should be paid . . . and demands that men should share domestic labor" (xi). The resurfacing of such concerns suggests that despite advancements made for women in both periods, the challenge of restructuring the social conditions of work and family had not been solved.

Margolis notes, "Although arguments for and against women's suffrage [at the turn of the century] were cloaked in terms of the maternal role, there was widespread agreement that the mother role was totally incompatible with paid employment" (41). Nevertheless, there were some feminists who rejected the notion that a woman's choice to work outside the home was detrimental to her children and family. In an article called "Mother-Worship" published in *The Nation* in March 1927, reprinted in 2002, an anonymous woman writes:

> I grew up confidently expecting to have a profession and earn my own living, and also confidently expecting to be married and have children. It was fifty-fifty with me. I was just as passionately determined to have children as I was to have a career. And my mother was the

> triumphant answer to all doubts as to the success of this double role . . . I have lived my life according to the plan. I have had the 'career' and the children and . . . I have earned my own living. I have even made a certain name for myself . . . I have never wavered in my feminist faith. (n.p.)

It is interesting that the same dilemma for women figured prominently in cultural conversations in the 1920s, an active period for feminism in the United States and Great Britain. The article's details reveal that the writer is college-educated, a fact that also resounds with more recent conversations about the advantages and disadvantages working women face in relation to motherhood, in that class issues place an additional burden on working-class women and further limit their choices about work and motherhood.

In the late 20th century, arguments about women being "out of their sphere" have been packaged slightly differently, as has the debate over the mother/worker dilemma. In August of 2001, the American Infertility Association launched a public service advertising campaign aimed at removing the "false sense of security about what science can do" for aging women who want to have children (Kalb 40). The campaign featured billboards and posters that were to be placed on buses that shows a baby bottle upside-down inside an hour glass, with text reminding women that the best time to conceive is in their twenties and early thirties. Kim Gandy, president of The National Organization for Women (NOW), when interviewed by *Newsweek*, said

she regarded the campaign as promoting the "ludicrous proposition" that women can choose at what age they will have children (42). Gandy notes that such a singular focus on age ignores factors such as a "stable relationship, financial stability, [and] life stability" that many women seek before having children (42). The doctors running the campaign argue that they simply want to "warn women that science can't always beat the biological clock" (Kalb 45). Yet their methods are a bit sensational, and the warnings go beyond simply educating women who are (allegedly) unaware of the "biological facts" about fertility.

The *Newsweek* article, "Should You Have Your Baby Now?" (2001), has a specific audience in mind: college-educated, career-oriented women.[17] The interviewees include a university professor married to a sports agent, a single movie studio sales representative, and a married consultant with one child. The photos show that these women come from varied ethnic backgrounds: African-American, Caucasian, and Indian. The implication is that the "fertility crisis" knows no ethnic boundaries. (Of course, there is first the implication that there is, in fact, a crisis.) Because they target career-oriented women and use what some perceive as scare tactics to communicate their message, both the *Newsweek* article and the "Protect Your Fertility" campaign read as cautionary tales to feminists who think they can "have it all." Motherhood takes on symbolic value: missing the opportunity to have children while pursuing a career is the great feminist sacrifice, a choice for which, according to Claudia Kalb, many women suffer "private anguish" (40).

Attention to the relationship between women's age and reproduction in the mainstream media is not new, though it has been repackaged over time, particularly as technological interventions in the reproductive process have increased. In 1976 *Ms.* magazine sported a cover story titled "How Late Can You Wait to Have a Baby?" In the article, Barbara Seaman addresses the risks to mothers and infants throughout the course of the mother's "reproductive life span," which she writes is from "15 to 44" years of age (45). She goes on to claim that "we have been oversold on the health advantages of starting our families early" (46), noting that only a special groups of birth defects, "the chromosomal abnormalities," have been conclusively linked to the mother's age (46). Seaman's article is interesting because it aims to illuminate the complicated areas of genetics and reproductive technology, such as amniocentesis, now a common test, which was not used in early pregnancy to detect birth defects until the late 1960s (47).

Seaman's article ultimately suggests that postponing pregnancy can sometimes be advantageous for both women and their children. She notes that a greater number of birth defects occur as a result of low birth weight,

> which in turn occurs most commonly in very young mothers, poorly nourished mothers, mothers whose pregnancies were spaced at less-than-two-year intervals . . . [and] *iatrogenic* (doctor-caused) and associates with the injudicious administration of drugs to pregnant women, excessive limitations on weight gain during pregnancy . . . the

> confined birth position, and other kinds of mismanagement of labor and delivery. (46)

Her point seems to be that women who are not adequately equipped financially or physically face greater risks than women who postpone having children in favor of their careers. Seaman's emphasis is less on declining fertility than on health risks to mothers and infants, and her conclusions suggest that in some cases waiting may present fewer risks for both mothers and children. As a result, the article does not read as the same kind of warning that appears in more recent articles about postponing the decision to have children. Nevertheless, the dilemma about women's choices at the heart of the discussion remains constant, and the ways in which medical science contributes to anxiety about these choices is evident.

In her 1988 article "Baby Pushing," Cleo Kocol argues that "Society says that having a baby is the way to go. . . Movies add to the problem. . . The implication seems to be that everyone wants and needs a baby, including macho-looking men" (33). Kocol cites American television shows such as *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show,* and movies such as *Baby Boom* and *Three Men and a Baby,* as popular culture reminders that the "biological timeclock is running out" (33). And though Kocol argues that the trend was more prevalent than ever in the late 1980s, at the beginning of the decade, in February 1982, *Time* magazine sported a cover story about the "Baby Bloom" among high-profile career moms over the age of 30, from actresses, such as cover model Jaclyn Smith, to news anchors. In the article, child psychologist

Carlotta Miles says, "Women no longer think that in order to be equal they have to take something fundamental away from themselves. The something turned out to be having a family" (qtd. in Reed 52).

When discussing the 1991 revival of *Top Girls* in interviews with Lizbeth Goodman, director Max Stafford-Clark, and actresses Deborah Findlay and Lesley Manville all state that the representations of career women in the 1980s differed drastically from representations of career women in the 1990s. For example, Stafford-Clark says that in the 1980s, women's magazines "portrayed opportunities for women" differently from representations at the beginning of the nineties when "there wasn't an advertisement that didn't feature both men and women holding babies—babies were the thing, whereas ten years previously, careers were the thing" (qtd. in Goodman, "Overlapping" 77). Yet the "Baby Bloom" article in *Time* shows pictures of several career women in advanced stages of pregnancy or holding their newly born infants, often in the workplace. At least in some venues, the emphasis on negotiating both worlds was apparent in the 1980s—careers *and* babies were "the thing."

Findlay makes a claim that is similar to Stafford-Clark's, noting specifically the "completely different view of women" presented in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in the two periods (qtd. in "Overlapping" 77). And Manville says that the "women's glossy magazines" they looked at for research on the original production of *Top Girls* in 1982 were

> all very American, all about just becoming 'new women,' and everything was about being hard and dressing male and not having babies . . . And looking at the same magazines nearly ten years later, it was just as startling because these same magazines were now telling us we had to be everything: we could be career women, and be in powerful positions, but we had to be mothers as well" (qtd. in "Overlapping 77)

Many women's magazines in the 1980s, however, also presented representations of women trying to balance work and motherhood that share a similar vocabulary with more recent representations. For example, the article "Success and Love: Do I Have To Choose?" in *McCall's* (1982) features a photograph that is a split image of a woman sitting at a desk. On one side she is dressed in a business suit, wearing glasses, and talking on the telephone; on the other side she is dressed casually, and instead of her adding machine, a baby is perched atop the desk. For me the most significant difference between this image and the April 15, 2002 cover of *Time*, in which a very cheerful baby has been superimposed onto an inordinately full and messy desktop inbox, is the noticeable absence of the mother from the picture. The cover for Hewlett's *Creating a Life* shows a decidedly less happy baby sitting inside what looks like a large doctor's bag; again, there is no mother in sight.

Where women in the 1980s faced "the superwoman squeeze, the constant pressure to juggle home, family, and job" (Langway 72), women in the 21st century,

according to Jill Kirby, are rejecting "the Eighties and Nineties work ethic . . . women [are] more confident about valuing home and family life and deciding that they want to fit their work around it, rather than fit their home life around work" (qtd. in O'Kelly, "It Beats" n.p.). In the aforementioned 2001 issue of *Newsweek*, Marie Brenner's follow-up article, "Not Their Mothers' Choices," focuses on what she argues is a growing trend of women who are abandoning their careers for stay-at-home-motherhood. Lisa Belkin's "The Opt-Out Revolution," published in the *New York Times Magazine* in October 2003, and Lisa O'Kelly's article, "It Beats Working," published in the *Guardian Review*, a British newspaper's weekly magazine, in June 2004, both focus on the same trend among both American and British women that Brenner examines in her *Newsweek* piece: college-educated career women leaving the job force to stay at home with their children. O'Kelly's piece poses the question: "Is the steady flow of mothers back to the home a rebuke to the memory of their feminist forbears who worked for equal power and equal pay in the workplace?" (n.p.) Belkin's piece suggests that the answer to this question is "no." She writes, "this is not a failure of a revolution, but the start of a new one. It is about a door opened but a crack by women that could usher in a new environment at all" (11). A claim that seems a bit on the wishful thinking side, as Ilene H. Lang writes to the editors of the *New York Times* in response to Belkin's article, "The work-life debate isn't new, and neither are the comments in the article. But according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 72 percent of mothers in the United States with children under

the age of 18 work—either by choice or necessity. Only the few can afford to 'opt out'" (n.p.).

Like Belkin's and O'Kelly's, Brenner's article ultimately focuses on women who can afford to make such choices financially. Furthermore, she suggests that these women's working mothers, the generation against which the new stay-at-home moms are apparently rebelling, also worked from choice rather than necessity. By highlighting those who "operated households from mobile phones or let nannies raise [their] children" (49), she narrows the field to working mothers who can afford such luxuries. Like the authors of the article's companion piece, Brenner limits her focus to a very specific and narrow group of women. She, too, invokes motherhood as a symbol, though in this case feminism is sacrificed for it. The two articles reinforce the divide between "full-time mothers," a description that embodies the belief that mothers who work outside the home are not completely committed to their mother role, and "working mothers," a term still commonly used to describe mothers who are employed outside the home, even though some feminists avoid using because of its inherent dismissal of domestic labor as valuable work.[18]

Furthermore, in her *Newsweek* article, Brenner contributes to the debate over formula vs. breastfeeding, a personal choice that ultimately has financial implications as well as social ones, diverting attention from the more pressing public issue of accommodation. She writes, "we are told that the 21st century belongs to women as we ascend to leadership in every field, yet pediatricians and the breast-feeding lobby

terrorize working mothers who prefer formula" (49). She indicates that formula is the preferred choice of women who want to go back to work soon after delivering a child, suggesting that if a mother chooses to breastfeed (or is "strong-armed" into doing so) she will be held back by that choice rather than impeded by a system that does not accommodate her choice to breastfeed. For example, according to the Maternity Alliance, a 21-year-old British national charity "working to improve rights and services for pregnant women, new parents, and their families" (*MaternityAlliance.org*), in October 2003, Helen Williams brought a sex discrimination case against her employers, the Ministry of Defense, because their "guidance on maternity arrangements stated that if she wanted to continue breastfeeding beyond her maternity leave period she would have to take unpaid occupational maternity absence" ("Breastfeeding" 1).

This particular debate—accommodating pregnant women and mothers in the workplace—marks an area where feminists have diverged for decades. In 1986, an article in *Time* reported that NOW was challenging a California law that would grant up to as much as four months of unpaid leave to women who are "disabled by pregnancy or childbirth" (Leo 63). (Note the use of the term "disabled.") According to the article, both NOW and the ACLU were joining the California Federal Savings and Loan Association in its suit against the state of California because "singling out women for special benefits is discriminatory and dangerous" (Leo 63); the plaintiffs, who were arguing that the California law allowing "special" leaves for pregnancy was

forcing them to discriminate against men, were also supported by the Reagan administration and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Kamen A6). Betty Friedan, considered a pioneer of Second Wave Feminism, opposed both NOW and the ACLU, saying, "There has to be a concept of equality that takes into account that women are the ones who have the babies" (qtd. in Leo, "Are Women" 63). Many feminists attacked Friedan's opinion, urging her to change her position on the subject, though it was a position she had been espousing publicly since at least the beginning of the decade, when her book *The Second Stage* was published.

Brenner's article serves, ostensibly, as a feminist-informed response to the aforementioned article that precedes it in the August 2001 issue of *Newsweek*. It reads mainly as a lament for the apparent death of feminism that this emphasis on the domestic signals, as when Brenner notes that "in the 1970s twentysomething Manhattan women gathered for consciousness-raising groups. Today, women of their age are flocking to, yes, cooking clubs" (49). Brenner undermines her argument with such overt sarcasm because, by implying that women cannot attend cooking clubs and maintain a feminist identity, she alienates readers for whom the domestic is a part of their identity (feminist or not). Brenner's tone reflects what Nancy Rubin argues in her article "Women vs. Women: The New Cold War Between Housewives and Working Mothers" (1982): "the idea [in the 1970s] was that women should unite in order to reach common goals. In practice however, the events of the last decade may have done more to divide us than to bring us together" (94).

That some women feel alienated by positions such as Brenner's is evident in the published readers' responses to *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd's 2003 piece "Hot Zombie Love," in which she draws parallels between anxiety about gender issues in contemporary society and the thematic issues raised in the soon-to-be-released remake of the 1975 film *The Stepford Wives*. Arguing that women "have turned themselves into Stepford wives" between 1975 and 2003, Dowd writes, "There's even a retro trend among women toward deserting the fast track for a pleasant life of sitting around Starbucks gabbing with their girlfriends, baby strollers beside them, logging time at the gym to firm up for the he-man C.E.O. at home" (n.p.). One of the women writing in response to Dowd's column notes, "As a stay-at-home mother and a feminist, I was horrified by Maureen Dowd's reference to [the aforementioned trend] . . . My life as a stay-at-home mom . . . leaves little time for Starbucks or the gym . . . I respect that many parents make other choices. Mine is right for me. And freedom of choice is what feminism is all about" (Janoski n.p.).

Yet some would argue that those choices are not really choices at all because the options are so limited to begin with. In her introduction to the 1998 reprinting of *The Second Stage*, Betty Friedan writes, "What women and men today need is not the right to have babies at sixty-three, but real choices about having children in their twenties, thirties, or even in their forties, without paying an inordinate price or facing impossible dilemmas in their careers. We need to restructure hours and conditions of work" (xix). Friedan's proposition is not new. For example, in 1980, Lady Howe,

the former deputy chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission in the UK, proposed "more imaginative use[s] of part-time work . . . more nursery facilities . . . and more emphasis on training or re-training for those returning to work after their 'family break'" (6), sentiments that have been echoed in articles and books in both the U.S. and Great Britain from the 1970s to the present.[19]

Additionally, Dowd's suggestion that such a leisurely form of social motherhood is "retro" seems to conflict with many women's writings about work and motherhood from the 19th and 20th centuries. Rather than feeling free to chat at the coffee shop and burn calories at the gym, many stay-at-home mothers in the 1960s, for example, felt trapped in a maternal world that afforded them little time, money, or energy to engage in such activities. According to Hannah Gavron's *The Captive Wife*, a study of middle and working-class British mothers conducted in the mid 1960s, published posthumously in 1966, a majority of the women interviewed longed to return to work outside the home not only because financial constraints demanded it, but also because they "feel curiously functionless when not working" (122). Furthermore, most of the women in the survey note that they feel cut off from the rest of the world; the loneliness that comes from spending "all day in one room, trying to keep the children quiet because the landlady can't bear noise" (122) bears little resemblance to Dowd's description of today's stay-at-home (and take the kids out on the town) mother. That is not to say that such women do not exist, but to suggest that those women represent not the majority, but a privileged minority in

the realm of at-home mothers.

Other parallels exist between these recent conversations and ones that were happening in the 1970s and 1980s in both the United States and England. In 1986 *Newsweek* ran an article called "Feminism's Identity Crisis" in which Eloise Salholz asserts that

> because they have been criticized for throwing out the baby with the bath water, feminists have begun to make children a leading item on the movement's new "personal" agenda . . . acknowledging the excesses of an earlier generation, whose emphasis on equality for women sometimes crossed the line into outright contempt for motherhood, a number of leaders believe the movement must openly embrace basic female values, longings and priorities. (58)

The suggestion that motherhood is a "basic female value" is problematic, as it reproduces troublesome ideologies about women's "natural" roles. Yet Salholz's point that the priorities of mothers, be they working or stay-at-home, or the longings of women who would like someday to be mothers, should not be excluded from feminist agendas is critical.

According to Gretchen Ritter, in the past decade "women's rights advocates have grown silent on the topic of motherhood [and] few dare to criticize the new stay-at-home mom movement" (n.p.). In fact, according to an article in London's *Telegraph*, "supporters of full-time motherhood say the concept has become sexy, the

'new feminism,' and the preference of most women with young children" (n.p.). I feel compelled at this point to note that I am currently a stay-at-home mother, and I find the job far from sexy. Nor do I feel like I am part of a "movement." Many factors have contributed to my decision to stay at home with my child, and as a feminist, I often feel intensely conflicted about my choice. Mainly, however, I feel frustrated by the lack of practical options from which to choose, though I must also acknowledge that I enjoy certain privileges, such as advanced degrees and a partner who fully participates in sharing child-rearing and house-managing with me, privileges that not all mothers (or fathers) have.

Like the anonymous writer in *The Nation*, my personal experience led me to believe that I could balance a family and a career. My mother returned to full-time work outside the home when I was six years old. She was lucky enough to find a flexible job that enabled her to get home from work around the same time my brother and I were getting home from school. Yet I find that my twin vocations, acting and teaching, make the work-life balance a particularly tricky one, even if they can provide flexible schedules. Acting is a profession that does not easily accommodate the pregnant body, particularly on stage. For example, when I discovered I was pregnant, I was in the middle of the run of a play in which my character's personality was reflected in the short skirts, tiny tank tops, and boy briefs that I had to wear on stage—my character was often in states of undress. My body is inextricably linked to my work as an actor, and that fact was never more apparent to

me as during those months, as I gained five pounds almost immediately and worried about how my body's changes would begin to show.

Additionally, I had to turn down an offer to perform at this same theatre's summer Shakespeare festival, as there would be no way to conceal my pregnancy by the time June rolled around, nor would I be particularly fit in my seventh month of pregnancy for the rigors of outdoor performance. I have not, in fact, found an opportunity to perform since becoming a mother, for a myriad reasons, physical, geographical, and financial. This lack affects me not only personally, but also professionally. As I prepare to embark on a career in academia, the two-year gap in my performance resume will undoubtedly raise questions from potential employers.

There has been considerable debate in the pages of T*he Chronicle of Higher Education* in recent years—from 2001-2004—concerning academics and the challenges of the work-life balance. From being pregnant on the job market to negotiating parenthood on the tenure track, the range of opinions differs wildly and reveals fundamental ideological differences that center primarily on notions of choice and responsibility. Patrice Diquinzio writes that many feminists have recognized that "mothering can divide women, creating misunderstanding, suspicion, and hostility among women whose opportunities, choices, or experiences with respect to mothering are different" (x). When it comes to questions about balancing motherhood with teaching, research, and publishing, those divisions emerge most clearly in discussions of the "fairness" of standards as they apply to those with

children and those without.

For example, in 2001, in response to the American Association of University Professors' proposed policy for "granting extra time before tenure reviews to faculty members who care for newborns," many respondents to the "Colloquy" section of *The Chronicle* argued that such a policy discriminates against childless people. Jill Carroll, a lecturer at Rice University, writes, "People should take responsibility for the life decisions they make . . . and not expect everyone else to make up the difference for them . . . people do what they want to do; the rest is just excuses . . . I, for one, am tired of children and breeders getting all the consideration all the time" (n.p.). Though Carroll's position is extreme, many people who contributed to the discussion agree with her central argument about choice.

Though I agree that people should be responsible for their choices and the subsequent consequences of those choices, I cannot agree with Carroll's, and others', belief that raising children is a "lifestyle choice" that merits no efforts to re-imagine the demands of the workplace, be it white or blue collar, or traditional configurations of the family. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy writes,

> Working mothers are not new . . . [the] combination of work and motherhood has always entailed tradeoffs . . . what is new for modern mothers, though, is the compartmentalization of their productive and reproductive lives . . . the economic reality of most people's lives today is that families require more than one wage-earner . . . the physical (if

> not always the emotional) environment in which these compromises must me made is considerably different from the workplace of our ancestors. In some respects, omnipresent conflicts create even more tension today than in the past, because *the incentives to fix them strike mothers as optional* . . . Simply put, the pressures to change are less intense when children can (literally) live with the consequences. (109, emphasis added)

To suggest that becoming a mother is a choice that women should accept might simply be incompatible with their career choices, rather than to propose a re-examination of the structures that make such choices incompatible, ultimately reinforces traditional definitions of the family and gender roles within that structure.

Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean write, "Politically, the question is not whether texts reflect or change the world, but to what uses they are and have been put, and to what ends they are and can be used" (92). In the following chapters, I will explore the ways in which the plays of Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems challenge the contemporary tendency to "think about motherhood as an individual achievement and a test of individual will and self-discipline" (Douglas 4), as their examinations of women's experience in both the past and the present raise questions about social issues that are, for mothers and non-mothers, both personal and political.

Chapter 2:

1976: Rebellion, Revolution & Reproduction

As Churchill's and Gems's playwriting careers were progressing, so was the Feminist Movement. 1975, declared "International Women's Year" by the United Nations, was a significant year for women politically in England; the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act (1970)[20] were passed by Parliament on December 29. Also during this year, Margaret Thatcher rose to the position of Conservative Party leader. The socially progressive climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s was already beginning to shift by 1975. Thatcher herself noted at the time, "We are coming to yet another turning point in our long history" (qtd. in Wood 13), a turning point that would reach a climax with Thatcher's becoming England's first female Prime Minister in 1979.

As 1976 began, The Equal Pay Act (1970), the Sex Discrimination Act, and the feminist movement, or "women's lib," all featured prominently in the news. On what seems to be the extreme end of political views toward feminism and equal rights, "Mr. Michael Brotherton, Conservative MP for Louth, said: 'I am delighted that Prince Charles has come out with such sound sentiments about the nonsense of women's lib,'" referring to an interview the Prince gave to the American magazine *Good Housekeeping* in May 1976 ("Prince" 2). In the interview, Prince Charles refers to "women's libbers" as "idiotic women who go around telling all the other women to think the way they do—basically, I think, because they want to be men" (qtd. in

Keay 150). He goes on to say that he thinks "a lot of women forget that bringing up children is one of the greatest responsibilities that any woman can have," though he does concede that child-rearing is also a male's responsibility (qtd. in Keay 150). That high-profile political leaders felt comfortable making such statements at the time exemplifies the enormity of the hurdles women actually had to leap.

Among those hurdles was the challenge of balancing public and private lives; tensions between work and motherhood emerged in various ways. For example, women were in danger of being fired for becoming pregnant. According to Lorana Sullivan, in a January 1976 article in *The Times* entitled "Why Kris May be Fired for Having a Baby," the maternity rights guaranteed by the Employment Protection Act would not yet be enacted in June 1976. The focus of the article is a pregnant airline employee who refuses "to comply with [her employer] KLM's requests that she resign in writing" (59). The Act guaranteed such things as "the right for a woman to have her job back up to 29 weeks after the baby is born and also protect her against dismissal on grounds of pregnancy" (59). It also made provisions for pregnant employees to receive six weeks of maternity pay from a "State Maternity Fund," but that benefit would not be enacted until April 1977.

Additionally, the *Times* reported that working mothers "concentrated in low-status, ill paid jobs . . . face severe difficulties over the day care of their children" ("Many mothers" 4). Some women, such as Jennifer Harvey, complain of prospective employers asking questions at job interviews about their child-care

arrangements. Harvey writes, "until you [employers] wish to make child care your concern by providing nurseries for your employees' children on your premises, just accept that parents are capable of making adequate provision . . . without your interference" (15). Thus, despite the new employment laws, women still faced significant material and sociological challenges when trying to balance their roles as workers in and out of the home.

In her January 1976 newspaper article "New Thinking that Makes Woman's Traditional Role a More Attractive Prospect," Dr. Mia Kellmer Pringle notes that motherhood is "simultaneously over-romanticized and undervalued" and that babies are glamorized through media representation (smiling cherubs in ads). She argues that

> There is a danger that children are becoming pawns in the battle for women's full social and economic liberation. Present attitudes to women, and to motherhood in particular, are confused and ambivalent. It is nonsensical to argue that for men and women to have equal opportunities, they must be identical. (8)

Yet she does not advocate the establishment of nurseries/day care facilities for the children of working mothers. Rather, she suggests that the government "pay a salary to mothers, whether married or single" and provide them with training opportunities and shorter work hours to facilitate a return to the workforce once the children are in school (8).

It was in this social and political climate that Churchill and Gems made their first ventures into writing history plays. In September 1976, The Joint Stock Theatre Group performed Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. In October, *Vinegar Tom* was first presented by Monstrous Regiment. The same year, Gems's *Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi* was originally performed as *Dead Fish* at the Edinburgh Festival in August, and then in December, with its new title, in London. Her plays *The Project* and *Arthur & Guinevere* played at the SoHo Poly in July and October respectively. For Churchill, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* was the most enthusiastically received of her stage plays since *Owners* (1972); *Vinegar Tom* was not as well received at the time, as indicated by performance reviews of both plays by theatre critics such as Irving Wardle, Michael Coveney, and David Zane Mairowitz. For Gems, *Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi* was critically and commercially successful, despite its controversial ending. I have not been able to find any reviews of *The Project*, and have found only one of *Arthur & Guinevere*, by Michael Billington, which is mixed. Neither play seems to have been particularly significant commercially, and neither script was published.

All of these plays concern history and women's place within it. Additionally, all focus to some extent on social and political upheaval, drawing parallels between the past and the present; and all focus, to varying degrees, on women's position as reproducers. Churchill's two plays from 1976 are recognized by most critics as history plays because each is set in a previous historical period, and both deal with

documentary material. Gems's plays from this period introduce historical elements, but are not history plays in the conventional sense since one is set in the present and the other treats a mythological history of England as opposed to "actual" history. They do, however, suggest a starting point for the kind of history plays which Gems would begin producing the following year with *Queen Christina*.[21] Thus, 1976 marks the beginning of a phase in which both playwrights would produce plays that use history as a means of examining women's positions within both their own culture and the past.

The playwrights have clear contemporary political and social concerns that are rooted and reflected in the history that they represent on stage. Their plays seem to be influenced by Bertolt Brecht's claim that

> historical incidents are unique, transitory incidents associated with particular periods. The conduct of the persons involved in them is not fixed and 'universally human'; it includes elements that have been or may be overtaken by the course of history, and is subject to criticism from the immediately following period's point of view. The conduct of those born before us is alienated from us by incessant evolution. It is up to the actor to treat present-day events and modes of behaviour with the same detachment as the historian adopts with regard to those of the past. (140)

In many of their plays, Churchill and Gems employ techniques, some formal, some

thematic, that allow the specificity of the historical periods to exist simultaneously with an awareness of present connections to that past, sometimes quite explicitly, such as the temporal disruptions in *Vinegar Tom*, *Top Girls*, and *Cloud Nine*. As Janelle Reinelt notes, "dealing with historical material is not, by itself, an indication of historicization" (*After* 86).

***Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*: Motherhood and the Revolution**

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire was a collaborative project developed in workshops by Caryl Churchill and the Joint Stock Theatre Group; the play was first performed on September 7, 1976 at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland. The production subsequently played in London at the Theatre Upstairs, Royal Court, opening on September 21, 1976. There have been two major British revivals of the play. The first, mounted by the Tranter Theatre Company, was in London in 1978; it then toured England. In 1997, Mark Wing-Davey directed a touring production of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* for the National Theatre's Education Department. The American premiere of the play, directed by Lisa Peterson for the New York Theater Workshop, was in 1991.

Perhaps due to the play's subject, potentially preachy tone, or its structure, it remains one of Churchill's lesser-produced, lesser-known works. Linda Winer's review of the American production, for example, refers to the play as a "hair-shirt of historical didacticism," and notes that it is "intelligent, though far from clear or thrilling." Winer goes on to note that the material must have been more familiar to

British audiences of the 1970s, and suggests that for American audiences, "little of [it] would be clear without generous program notes from the theater" (82). Yet though the subject of the English revolution appears to have been popular in mid-1970s England, for besides Churchill's treatment of it, David Storey's *Cromwell* (1973) and Keith Dewhurst's *The World Turned Upside Down* (1978)[22] also played on British stages, the stories of the more radical revolutionaries were still relatively unknown.

Histories of the English Revolution that detailed the activities of political fringe groups such as the Ranters, Levellers, Diggers, Anabaptists, and others, appeared in the 1970s. Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* was published in 1972; G.E. Aylmer's collection of Leveller literature, *The Levellers in the English Revolution*, was published in 1975. Yet in 1986, Colin Davis wrote a book in which he argued, according to Christopher Hill, that the Ranters " were invented by contemporary propagandists for their own ideological purposes, and re-invented by twentieth century historians" (*Nation* 152). It is significant that historians turned to an examination of these groups in the 1970s and that by the mid-1980s, with Thatcher/Reagan Conservatism at its strongest, other historians would attempt to discredit the recovery of lost revolutionaries.

According to Churchill, the project of creating *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* began when Max Stafford-Clark asked her if she would "be interested in writing a play about the Crusades" (qtd. in Ritchie 118). Yet once she began reading about the Ranters, a religious fringe group whose beliefs included such things as a "rejection of

hell and the devil, scepticism [sic] about the special sanctity of the Bible" and a "subversion of the subordinate position of women" (Hill, *Nation* 153-155), Churchill changed her focus. She proceeded to do research on the period, and cites the work of Christopher Hill and 17th century writings, such as Gerrard Winstanley's 1649 pamphlet *The True Leveller's Standard Advanced*, as her major sources (Ritchie 119). The workshops centered largely on improvisation and games, often incorporating actors' personal experiences and observations. After this stage in development, Churchill notes that she had a nine-week writing period, and that she came to the first rehearsal with an incomplete script (Ritchie 119).

The play was brought to the Edinburgh festival in September of 1976, with a cast of 6 actors playing 25 different characters. It was directed by Max Stafford-Clark. Churchill writes that

> The play was performed with a table and six chairs, which were used as needed in each scene. When any chairs were not used they were put on either side of the stage, and actors who were not in the scene sat at the side and watched the action. They moved the furniture themselves. Props were carefully chosen and minimal. (*Light* i)

This minimalist approach, combined with the cross-casting, contributes to the anonymity of the characters in the play, allowing audiences to identify more easily with the historical characters because of the "Every(wo)man" quality that is created.

Additionally, the continuous presence of the actors on stage, even when they

are not "performing," indicates a Brechtian influence on the style of the play, which also serves to heighten the social commentary inherent in the piece; as Janelle Reinelt notes, "Churchill's casting devices create a kind of A-effect that encompasses the performer-as-subject as well as the role" (*After* 90). In the case of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, the "performer-as-subject" is foregrounded by the actors' occasional role as spectators. Furthermore, this technique embodies Brecht's theory that

> the character remains under observation and is tested. The technical term for this procedure is "fixing the 'not. . . but'" The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying . . . once the idea of total transformation is abandoned the actor speaks his part not as if he were improvising it himself but like a quotation. ("Short Description" 137-138)

By having the actors view the action when they are not playing characters in a given scene, Churchill undercuts the "idea of total transformation" because the actors are always aware of themselves as characters, and the audience is always aware of the actors as actors.

The ensemble cast ultimately generates a focus on a group rather than on the individual, reinforcing the themes of the work. The sense of collectivity in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* accentuates the pre-Marxian communist ideals present in the political philosophies of the Levellers, Ranters, and Diggers, the 17th Century rebels who are at the center of Churchill's play. Churchill literally de-emphasizes the

individual in this play by having characters played by different actors each time they appear. According to Amelia Howe Kritzer, "this technique [cross-casting] produces Brechtian alienation by disrupting the audience's expected emotional identification with individual characters" (99). Churchill herself notes that "the audience should not have to worry exactly which character they are seeing . . . This seems to reflect better the reality of large events like war and revolution where many people share the same kind of experience" (*Light* iv). This choice, combined with the spectator/character identity of the actors, encourages audiences to examine both the historical and the present moments by foregrounding the construction of history through representation and by emphasizing the fluidity of identity within that construction.

The play is set in England between the years 1647 and 1649, when, according to Churchill,

> a revolutionary belief in the millenium [sic] . . . broke out strongly at the time of the civil war. Soldiers fought the king in the belief that Christ would come and establish heaven on earth. What was established instead was an authoritarian parliament, the massacre of the Irish, the development of capitalism. (Churchill, "Light Shining" iii)

Much of the dialogue in the play is taken from historical sources such as pamphlets from the period and transcripts of the Putney Debates (1647). The final scene of the

play acts as a coda; set in 1660 after the restoration of the king, it shows the fallout from the years of upheaval through the eyes of the characters, some historical, some fictional, who did not achieve their social and political goals.

The issues of parliamentary control, Irish massacre, and the ills of capitalism addressed in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* were also at the center of social concerns in 1970s England: women were seeking greater legal equality and attempting to change laws that restricted them; censorship of the Theatre had only recently been altered with the passing of the Theatres Bill (1968), which ended the Lord Chamberlain's power to censor plays; violence in Ulster was increasing throughout the period, as Christopher Walker notes in the *Times*, "The 1976 figure [of total deaths in Northern Ireland as a result of 'terrorist' violence] is the highest recorded in any 12-month period during the present crisis with the exception of 1972" (1); and labor disputes, often over wages, were common, including a strike by the stage staff at the National Theatre in August 1976. The resignation of Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1976 indicates the intensity of these struggles; even though the Labour Party remained in control, the Conservative opposition gained strength throughout the period. Workers' strikes in 1978-1979 ultimately led to the defeat of Labour PM James Callaghan and opened the door for the Margaret Thatcher-led Conservative government that would remain in power for the next two decades.

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire presents an episodic compression of time, the action of the play spanning several years, but the style of the scenes remains

naturalistic. Though the scenes in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* are punctuated by songs, there is not the temporal disruption that exists in *Vinegar Tom*; most of the songs in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* are Bible verses, and, thus, are suited to both the historical period and the themes of the play. There is one anachronism in the play, however. One of the songs is an excerpt from Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road" (1856). The poem fits thematically, and linguistically, but it is not of the period. Nevertheless, Whitman's poem does not introduce the same kind of sharp contrast to the world of the play that the contemporary songs in *Vinegar Tom* do because it does not stand out as markedly. Ultimately, however, it is interesting to note that even in the most historically-rooted of Churchill's plays, there is at least one temporal disruption, albeit a slight and almost imperceptible one.

In 1976, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* was much more well-received by critics than *Vinegar Tom*, due in part to the historical "faithfulness" of the former as opposed to the jarring clash between past and present in the latter. Reviewing *Vinegar Tom* in 1976, for example, Michael Coveney writes that

> The play falters in its lack of faith in dramatic analogy, let alone the power of the story as it stands. The music . . . spells out the fact that we all need to find something to burn . . . Such sentiment, although arguably admirable, is hardly achieved in the play itself. Or rather, it is *potentially* achieved and then tossed away in righteous overstatement. (qtd. in Fitzsimmons 33-34)

Similarly, David Zane Mairowitz argues that "the playtext is not strong enough to withstand the breaking of its rhythm and antagonism of the musical interludes" (25), whereas he praises *Light Shining* for avoiding such "obviousness." In his review of the original production of *Light Shining* Irving Wardle writes, "Numerous points of contact with the modern world . . . crop up naturally; but only in one scene . . . is the connexion [sic] underlined" (20). These contemporary critical responses suggest resistance to what Kritzer labels "the confrontational" (*Empowerment* 95), but also reflect a desire, on the critics' part, to keep history contained within itself.

One of the ways in which Churchill makes a connection between the past and the present in these two plays is by examining the ways in which motherhood relates to material oppression. Elaine Aston notes that "although gender is not a primary focus in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, as it is in *Vinegar Tom*, ordinary women are shown to be more oppressed than men, both productively and reproductively" (*Churchill* 58). For example, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* addresses the ways in which institutions such as Parliament and the church in the 17th Century used arguments about women's "natural" inferiority (physical, moral and intellectual) to justify their second-class status. Women's biological capacity to reproduce is typically the foundation for this argument. Throughout the play, such cultural attitudes shape the women's lives in various ways. The belief that women are morally and physically inferior to men ultimately keeps them in a subordinate position, as they are not allowed to own property, lead, or speak in church.

Churchill illustrates women's lack of individual rights, to the point of a woman having virtually no identity that is separate from a man who is either her father or her husband, in the third scene of the play, "Margaret Brotherton is Tried." Brotherton, a vagrant, is introduced as two male JPs try her for the crime of begging and admonish her for being fifty miles from the parish in which she was born, noting that "it's only our own poor who get help from this parish" (4). The scene examines the mistreatment of the poor in general, but places additional emphasis on the plight of poor women whose identities, and ultimately their rights as citizens, are tied to their husbands or fathers.

The power dynamics of the scene dramatize Brotherton's plight as both a poor person and a woman. The stage directions note that Brotherton is "*barely audible*" at the beginning of the scene, and she manages to say only ten words throughout the entire scene: her name, the name of the town where she was born, and "I don't know what you mean" (4). The structure of the scene ultimately produces a darkly comic effect, as the two JPs' quick banter and completion of each other's sentences reads like a vaudeville act, particularly at the top of the scene in their exchange about the man they've just finished sentencing:

1ST JP. Is this the last?

2ND JP. One more.

1ST JP. It's a long list.

2ND JP. Hard times.

1ST JP. Soft hearts. Yours.

2ND JP. Step forward please.

1ST JP. I still say he should have been hanged.

2ND JP. He'll die in jail . . .

1ST JP. That's no example, nobody sees it. (4)

The incongruity of the topic and the style of the conversation, and the fact that the men are making life and death decisions about the "criminals" who appear before them, while the accused are given no opportunity to actually speak for themselves, produces a disruption of the historical moment that allows the audience to examine the situation critically. Churchill uses this device more elaborately in the final scene of *Vinegar Tom*, as the 15th century theorists Kramer and Sprenger recite passages from their treatise on witches in the style of Edwardian music hall gents.

As the scene unfolds, the JPs discuss Brotherton's options as if she were not present, drawing attention to her lack of agency:

1ST JP. You must go back to where you were born.

2ND JP. If her parents didn't come from there they won't take her.

1ST JP. Her father's parish.

2ND JP. She's never been there.

1ST JP. The parish she last lived in.

2ND JP. They turned her out for begging.

1ST JP. Exactly, and so do we.

2ND JP. Why aren't you married?

BROTHERTON. . . .

1ST JP. Can we please agree on a sentence.

2ND JP. First offence. Let's be lenient . . . Margaret Brotherton, we find you guilty of vagrancy and sentence you to be stripped to the waist and beaten to the bounds of this parish and returned parish by parish to . . .

1ST JP. Where she was born.

2ND JP. To the parish where you were born. Next please. (5)

The 2nd JP's question about Brotherton's status as an unmarried woman suggests that she violates cultural norms by being single, and that her plight is compounded by this choice. Furthermore, that she can only expect help from her father's parish, rather than her mother's or even her own birthplace, emphasizes the patrilineal structure of her society and the resulting lack of women's rights as individual citizens. Such laws affected British women in the 1970s as well; for example, as late as 1979, "British men [could] pass on their nationality to their offspring no matter where the children [were] born. British women [did] not have that right" (Mills 15).

Arguments against women as preachers or leaders surface in scene seven, "Hoskins Interrupts the Preacher," a scene that highlights the use of religion to justify women's second-class status. When Hoskins, a female vagrant preacher, first appears she exuberantly joins in with the congregation, saying "amen" to the

preacher's call for rising up against the king in the name of God. Yet when the preacher suggests that only some people have been "chosen" by God and others will be cast into hell, Hoskins challenges him. As a Ranter, Hoskins rejects the notions of hell and predestination. She also rejects the notion that women are inferior to men and not allowed to speak publicly. Her violation of accepted cultural norms becomes clear when the preacher says, "I know it has got about that I allow answers to my sermons. But this is taking the freedom to speak too far . . . I do not allow women to speak at all since it is forbidden" (14-15).

Thus, though the Preacher admittedly runs an unorthodox operation, he still adheres to certain prejudices that are prevalent in the culture. He admonishes Hoskins for her outburst by using the Bible to illustrate the validity of his position, saying, "For Adam was first formed then Eve. And Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (14). Hoskins challenges his selective application of Biblical verse by pointing out that some verses acknowledge women as prophets, saying, "your sons and daughters shall prophecy . . . and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days I will pour out my spirit" (14). By countering the preacher's arguments with an alternate verse from the same source, Hoskins shows how people in positions of authority manipulate religion in order to advance their own agendas. Unfortunately for her, she is not in like-minded company, and she suffers a beating at the hands of the men in the congregation for her transgression.

The play does not suggest, however, a simple picture of discrimination against women; not all of the men in the play are opposed to women's equality. Claxton, a man who was present at the meeting, takes pity on Hoskins, bringing her home so that his wife can help treat her wounds. Claxton's Wife, the character's name revealing that her position in society is inextricably linked to her husband, expresses her fears about the "improper" church, saying, "I'm not going there if they beat women"

> CLAXTON. No but they let you speak.
>
> WIFE. No but they beat her.
>
> CLAXTON. No but men. They let men speak. (16)

That even an unorthodox church, willing to commit treason against the king in the name of God, refuses to allow women the same rights as men, suggests that though many of the revolutionaries sought equality for citizens across class lines, women were not a part of the equation. The men who grant women the same freedoms are on the outermost fringe of their society. Claxton himself eventually wanders to this outermost fringe, to the point of leaving England altogether after the Restoration.

Claxton's Wife, however, does not consider the possibility of women being equal. She argues with Hoskins, supporting the validity of the church's position on women, saying,

> But women can't preach. We bear children in pain, that's why. And they die. For our sin. Eve's sin. That's why we have pain. We're not

clean. We have to obey. The man, whatever he's like. If he beat us, that's why. We have blood, we're shameful, our bodies are worse than a man's. All bodies are evil but ours is worst. That's why we can't speak. (17-18)

Claxton's Wife's acceptance of the preacher's position shows that some of the women in this society believe that the fact that they can have children is actually something that marks them as being inferior to men. Yet they are simultaneously legally forbidden from preventing the birth of children, through either birth control or abortion, creating a paradox that both condemns and glorifies motherhood; it is base because it is the result of sin, but it is sacred because a life is created.

This paradox is best illustrated by the discussion of the Virgin Mary that opens the penultimate scene of the play, "The Meeting." Social outcasts, two women, Hoskins and Brotherton, and three men, Briggs, Cobbe, and Claxton, have gathered in a drinking place to attend a prayer meeting of their own device. Brotherton, new to such unorthodox worship, asks: "What do I do?"

COBBE. Anything you like. I worship you, more than the Virgin Mary.

HOSKINS. She was no virgin.

CLAXTON. Christ was a bastard.

HOSKINS. Still is a bastard.

BROTHERTON. I thought you said this was a prayer meeting.

CLAXTON. This is it. (47)

The simultaneous praise and denigration of Mary in this exchange reflects cultural attitudes about women in general. Mary's virgin status is a myth, and by referring to it sarcastically Hoskins insults Mary, leading to the insult against Christ. The exchange is comic, particularly Brotherton's line about the prayer meeting. Yet Mary is ultimately the butt of the joke, for Christ cannot be a "bastard" without her. Mary is the only woman the Church absolves from the sinful, sexual element of being a mother because it is important for Christ's mother to be different from Eve and other women. Yet Hoskins points out that she was, in fact, not different. The characters here address the hypocrisy of the church's teachings but they also reproduce it in their own approach to the subject.

As the scene continues, Brotherton's discomfort about the meeting increases, and her fear reminds the audience of the difficulty in changing people's beliefs, even if they are oppressed by those beliefs. Hoskins' suggestion, "Let us pray. Or whatever" (48), is met with silence. Then Brotherton asks, "When's he coming?"

COBBE. Who?

HOSKINS. The preacher.

COBBE. You're the preacher.

BROTHERTON. What? No, I can't.

HOSKINS. Don't frighten her.

CLAXTON. Anyone has anything to say from God, just say it.

Silence. (48)

Despite their suggestion that anyone can preach, even the most radical thinkers in the scene seem to have difficulty letting go of accepted customs, as the silence that bookends this section indicates. Once Claxton begins to speak, however, the group feeds off of each other and begins to pray to the memory of martyred Levellers such as Robert Lockyer and others who gave their lives for their cause. Yet Brotherton still has difficulty joining in. She admits that she hasn't been to church in a long time and that she hides on Sundays so that she will not be conspicuous, saying, "they notice you in the street if everyone's in church" (50). Nevertheless, she still believes that this prayer meeting is not something of which God would approve.

Religion, for Brotherton, appears to be more about censure than salvation. As a result, she remains silent for much of the rest of the scene, and she does not want to share their communion because she believes she is damned. Her inability to join in with the others stems from her belief that she's "wicked, all women are wicked" (57). Like Claxton's wife, Brotherton accepts "Eve's sin" as the sin of all women. She does not believe she is worthy of speaking, or even of being touched by other people, because she is evil, in part, simply because she is a woman.

Such attitudes also contribute to the belief, held by people such as Claxton's Wife, that the suffering that comes from the deaths of children is yet another punishment for "Eve's sin." When Hoskins contradicts Claxton's Wife in scene eight, arguing that women are not inherently evil, the latter argues that because

Hoskins has never had children she cannot truly understand women's suffering. Despite this dismissal of the validity (or lack thereof) of her experience, Hoskins attempts to convince Claxton's Wife that children "die because how we live. My brothers died. Died more of hunger than fever. My mother kept boiling up the same bones" (18). Hoskins refuses to accept such suffering as the natural course of events; by pointing out that specific material conditions, not ambiguous, unalterable predestination, cause such suffering, Hoskins's argument draws attention to the course of history and the potential to change that course. In this way, the scene embodies Brecht's theory that "'historical conditions' must of course not be imagined . . . as mysterious Powers (in the background); on the contrary, they are created and maintained by men (and will in due course be altered by them): it is the actions taking place before us that allow us to see what they are" (190) in both style and content; the historical moment in which Hoskins exists is presented for examination, as is the present moment, precisely because her philosophy disputes the notion of those "mysterious Powers" that determine the course of history.

The theme of mothers suffering because they cannot afford to raise their children, or even keep them alive, is consistent throughout the play. It seems that the sacred value of life does not extend far beyond the womb, since few provisions are made to help support the children once they are born. Churchill explores the ways in which the material burden of motherhood, especially for single mothers or working-class women with large broods, is exacerbated by the fact that these women

are not capable of having jobs that will help them feed, clothe, and house their children; the women, if they can work at all, do not earn as much money as men in their society, and there is no accommodation made for child care to facilitate employment.

The problem is not only applicable to women, as working class men such as Briggs discuss their children's plight as well, but the women feel the brunt of it in a different way because they have fewer options. For example, Briggs can take care of his family by joining the army and sending money home to them (7-8), but women do not have the same flexibility or venues for employment. In the scene called "A Woman Leaves Her Baby," two anonymous women discuss this kind of crisis:

> 1ST WOMAN. Now I'm here I can't do it . . .
>
> 2ND WOMAN. We come all this way . . .
>
> We come so they can look after her.
>
> 1ST WOMAN. I can't.
>
> 2ND WOMAN. I know but just put her down . . .
>
> She die if you keep her.
>
> 1ST WOMAN. I can't . . .
>
> 2ND WOMAN. What you do then? You got no milk. She not even crying now, see. That's not good. You en had one, I'm telling you, she dying.
>
> 1ST WOMAN. If I drunk more water. Make more milk.

2ND WOMAN. Not without food. Not how ill you are. (44-45)

The women are marked as lower class by their colloquial speech and also by the fact that they are malnourished to the point where the new mother's body cannot produce milk for her baby. Even though the woman desperately wants to care for her child, she realizes the child's survival depends upon abandonment.[23] That the women have come to leave the baby at a "special house," the mayor's house, in a "good town" (45) suggests that the practice was not uncommon because the women have made a deliberate choice about exactly where to leave the infant so that she will have the best chance of survival. Social conditions dictate the woman's choices, and while the play does not overtly underline the connection between the past and the present, the audience can recognize that similar social conditions drive contemporary women to make such choices as well.

Near the end of the play, Churchill returns to the stark choice unwed, lower class mothers sometimes face in "The Meeting." Brotherton eventually reveals that her deepest guilt is about the abandonment/murder of her child. She says,

> It was a sin. I knew it was. I killed my baby. The same day it was born. I had a bag. I put it in the ditch. There wasn't any noise. The bag moved. I never went back that way . . . He wasn't baptised. He's lost. I lost him. (58)

The others attempt to convince her that the sin is not hers, but a sin of the society that forces her to make such a sacrifice by providing her with no other options. As

Shari L. Thurer argues in *The Myths of Motherhood*, child abandonment in the 16th and 17th centuries was linked to changing definitions of motherhood. She writes that "women of the under class who abandoned and killed their babies did so *in extremis*. Victims of a culture that accorded them no role . . . they had no other option" primarily because the "job description of the good mother: the mother at home, installed in a patriarchal household and naturally inclined toward subservience" solidified during this period (181); unmarried mothers were often "barred from employment" (178). Thus working mothers, especially single mothers, in the 17th century were in particularly dire circumstances.

Furthermore, the historical setting of the play shows how mothers bear the burden of war in various ways. In addition to losing their children and husbands to the violence of war, killed as soldiers and civilians, on both sides of the conflict, they must also negotiate the material effects of war, such as the lack of food, clothing, and shelter war generates. Soldiers' wives, such as Briggs's wife, are left alone to care for the children. The government wages, "eightpence a day" with "keep . . . taken out" (8), don't leave much to send to those left at home, though Briggs notes that the pay for being a soldier is more than he currently makes as a laborer. Thus, even mothers in traditional marriages have little money and little physical and emotional relief from the day-to-day work of caring for their children because they are, in effect, single parents while their husbands are off fighting.

The play also suggests that because the business of war is never over, families

must consistently contend with the conditions war creates. The civil war in England is not the only front on which soldiers fight; sending men to Ireland to keep the Catholics in line is a priority for Cromwell once the monarchy has been overthrown. As the officer Star tells Briggs, "If you still want to serve the cause of the saints, sign for Ireland. Cromwell himself is going, that says something. It's the same war we fought here. We'll be united again. We'll crush the papists just as we did in England" (38). As one war ends, another begins, this time taking the men further away from their families, and proving Briggs's belief that he "won't be long" when he signs up for duty to be false (7). Because the conflict in Ireland was particularly strong in 1976, and bleeding over into England regularly in the form of bombings carried out by Irish nationalists, an audience at the time would likely be moved to consider the troubling fact that the war on that front had spanned centuries, and that there was, at that moment, no end in sight.

Thus, when one of the actors, with no character designation, recites from a Leveller pamphlet "addressed to the army" from April 1649 (41), an explicit connection to the present emerges. Speaking directly to the audience, he says,

> Whatever they may tell you or however they may flatter you, there's danger lies at the bottom of this business for Ireland . . . Sending forces into Ireland is for nothing else but to make way by the blood of the army to extending their territories of power and tyranny. For the cause of the Irish natives in seeking their just freedoms, immunities

and liberties is exactly the same with our cause here. (41)

Because the stage directions indicate that the speech is "announced" by an actor rather than a character, and the source of the material is stated at the beginning of the speech, Churchill provides a moment in which the audience may directly confront the history of "The War in Ireland," as the scene is called. By showing that at least a segment of the British army resisted this conflict in the 17th century, the relevance of such sentiments to the audience's own historical moment is also presented for consideration.

Furthermore, Briggs's assertion in the preceding scene that the Irish are fighting for the same freedoms as the British encourages the audience to recognize the connection between themselves and people in Northern Ireland. Because Briggs has already devoted years of his life fighting for a cause he has come to see as corrupt, his sympathies lie not with his country but with his class; ordinary people were not, in his opinion, served by the revolution, as "the army is as great a tyrant as the king was" (40). The contemporary connection is striking. In Northern Ireland, even in the time of a supposed truce, people had to contend with armed patrols whose "presence on the streets is . . . heavy; two jeeps at a time, driving up and down, and foot patrols round every corner," and soldiers with submachine guns "lurk[ing] round the houses, in the gardens, near the main road," causing palpable fear when they show up near the doors of families who had been subjected to house raids (McKay 14). By aligning himself with working men and women, whether

British or Irish, Briggs calls into question the oppression of the working class across national boundaries and draws attention to the ongoing oppression of the Irish.

The plight of women in Northern Ireland in the 1970s was especially difficult, as the fight for equal rights that made such headway in the rest of the United Kingdom, as well as the rest of Europe and the U.S., at the time was virtually non-existent there. As Mary McKay notes in her 1976 article "Living With the Army in Your Front Garden," published in *Spare Rib*,

> Women in N. Ireland suffer from the general pattern of deprivation. Their conditions as women are even worse than in the rest of the U.K. 36% work outside the home, and they are even more confined to traditional women's work in textile and service industries . . . Women can't be postmen, and only very recently bus conductresses. The Sex Discrimination Act does not apply at all in N. Ireland. The Equal Pay Act is so watered down as to be useless: there is a special clause . . . that allows employers to keep special grades for women's work . . . (10)

Furthermore, "the liberalisation of the British divorce laws" and the "Abortion Act of 1967" did not apply in Northern Ireland in 1976, either (McKay 11). Thus it seems women's options, as both producers and reproducers, in Northern Ireland were even more curtailed than those in the rest of Great Britain. Ironically, working women in Northern Ireland also had a significantly higher number of children per

household than women in other places. Thus the second-class status of Irish citizens, coupled with the presence of a standing army, seems to have been especially burdensome for Irish women.

Though critics such as Irving Wardle and Anthony Jenkins suggest that only the scene in which a butcher rails at his customers acts as an "overt" connection to the present, the last two scenes of the play, "The Meeting" and "After," provide several speeches that directly address the connection between the history represented in the word of the play and the present moment. As Geraldine Cousin suggests,

> Though their hopes are eventually crushed, the penultimate scene entitled "The Meeting" establishes a sense of possible ways of seeing, and being, that questions the finality of the loss of hope suggested by the last scene. ("Owning" 200)

Cousins focuses on the characters' enactment of the Eucharist, and their healing of Brotherton in the process. As the communion ceremony begins, Briggs delivers what is perhaps the most pointed connection to the present. He says,

> Christ will not come. I don't believe it . . . I don't believe this is the last days. England will still be here in hundreds of years. And people working so hard they can't grasp how it happens and can't take hold of their own lives, like us till we had this chance, and we're losing it now, as we sit here, every minute. Jesus Christ isn't going to change it. (53)

Briggs's speech directly implicates the audience, who exist hundreds of years in

Briggs's future. It is the most self-reflexive moment in the play, and it forces the audience to consider their own place in history in relation to the history they are watching, encouraging them to recognize that they now have a similar chance at effecting change and that they cannot rely on divine intervention but need, instead, to look to themselves.

Furthermore, contrary to Cousins's assertion, the final scene of the play, "After," in which the outcasts discuss what happened to them once the revolution was over and the monarchy was restored, does not necessarily suggest a loss of hope. Even though Hoskins laments the missed opportunities, "It was time but somehow we missed it. I don't see how" (61), Brotherton notes that the "bastards won't catch me," as she continues to live her life as a vagrant (62). Thus, though Hoskins is defeated and disillusioned, Brotherton's attitude is one of mounting resistance; not everyone gives up. It is significant that there is a role reversal at this point in the play. Hoskins was once the more confident revolutionary, but now Brotherton, whose worldview has been markedly less political than Hoskins's until this point, resists more adamantly, having gained confidence from the others at the gathering, suggesting hope for the possibility of change.

Similarly, Claxton's speech, the final words of the play, leaves room for hope by acting as a call to action. He says,

> There's an end of outward preaching now. An end of perfection.
>
> There may be a time . . . I sometimes hear from the world that I have

> forsaken. I see it fraught with tidings of the same clamour, strife and contention that abounded when I left it. I give it the hearing and that's all. My great desire is to see and say nothing. (62)

Though Meenakshi Ponnuswami refers to Claxton's speech as "resigned" (54), Claxton's desire to "say nothing" is not necessarily intended to be a model for the audience. Rather, the audience, ideally, will be inspired to do the opposite by realizing that the present moment is the time that Claxton imagines. In witnessing the failure of possibilities past, the audience must confront the crises of the present and not miss the opportunity a second time.

Thus, though there is surely a sense of loss in the final scene, it is possible to read into that loss a challenge to the audience. Kritzer contends that the play

> rejects a 'tragic' view of history that affirms the inevitability of oppression, and allies itself with Brecht's intent that epic theatre help to overturn the conditioned acceptance of given social structures as natural or unassailable. (*Empowerment* 102)

By giving voice to those on the margins of history, and by insisting that the "lived, private experience is also political" (Ponnuswami 54), Churchill allows room for the audience to find hope for the possibility of change, despite the apparent failure of the revolutionaries.

***Vinegar Tom*: Controlling Bodies**

1976 also marked Churchill's first collaboration with the feminist theatre

collective Monstrous Regiment. The play, Monstrous Regiment's second production, was first performed in Hull on October 12, 1976, and then opened in London on December 14, 1976, transferring to the Half Moon theatre on January 17, 1977. As with *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, the development process for *Vinegar Tom* intimately involved the company that was to perform the finished script; Monstrous Regiment's notes in the acting edition of the script state that "the writer/group collaboration was so close, with Caryl attending all rehearsals, it isn't easy to pinpoint where specific ideas came from" ("Monstrous" 72).

Vinegar Tom is also set in the 17th century, though not in as rigidly defined a moment as *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Describing the play's setting, Churchill writes,

> I didn't base the play on any precise historical events, but set it rather loosely in the mid-seventeenth century, partly because it was the time of the last major English witchhunts, and partly because the social upheavals, class changes, rising professionalism and great hardship among the poor were the context of the kind of witchhunt I wanted to write about. ("Author's Notes" 66)

The action of the play centers on the witch-hunts that claimed the lives of many people, mostly women, during that period. The characters and the dialogue in *Vinegar Tom* are not adapted from documentary material, with the exception of the last scene, in which the majority of the dialogue is taken from Heinrich Kramer and

James Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of Witches* or *The Witch Hammer)* (1486). The play is historical nevertheless, for the kinds of people who are imagined, and the things that happen to them as they are accused of witchcraft, are based on historical accounts of the period.

Vinegar Tom ultimately takes more creative liberties with dramatic structure than *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. The play consists of twenty naturalistic scenes set in the 17th century, one scene that uses documentary material from the 15th century but plays as an Edwardian music hall act, and seven songs performed in modern dress. The approach to history in *Vinegar Tom* is different as a result. There is a more overt connection to the present in *Vinegar Tom*, about which Gillian Hanna, a founding member of Monstrous Regiment, says,

> We had a very real feeling that we didn't want to allow the audience to get off the hook by regarding it as a period piece, a piece of very interesting history. Now a lot of people felt their intelligence was affronted by that . . . [but] I believe that the simple telling of the historical story, say, is not enough. (10)

By highlighting the historical connections in this way, *Vinegar Tom* creates a more disruptive version of history than *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*.

The kind of witch-hunts that Churchill describes as being her concern in *Vinegar Tom* are relevant to the conditions of her own time as well, a point made explicit in the penultimate song of the play, "Lament for the Witches," which urges

the audience to

> Look in the mirror tonight.
>
> Would they have hanged you then?
>
> Ask how they're stopping you now.
>
> Where have the witches gone?
>
> Who are the witches now?
>
> Ask how they're stopping you now.
>
> Here we are. (60)

The song draws attention to the kinds of struggles women in 1970s England faced for legal equality in property ownership, employment, and education, as well as birth control and abortion rights, all topics that are addressed to some extent in the 17th century world of the play. Elaine Aston suggests that

> the songs are a critical and crucial key to the formal and ideological work of the play. As they are to be performed out of character and in modern dress, they create the opportunity for the performer to insert her body into the performance text as a si[gh]te of disruption. (*Churchill* 27)

In this song, for example, the refrain "here we are" calls attention to the moment of performance in which the actresses identify themselves as contemporary individuals rather than historical characters; however, in a sense, they still function as characters because they are embodying the specific role of performer in this context, making

the present an historical moment as well. Furthermore, because the song immediately follows the graphic execution of two of the accused witches, Joan and Ellen, who have been hanging on stage throughout the two previous scenes, the performers' self-identification as contemporary witches challenges the finality of that history by suggesting that such persecution continues to thrive in the present.

Like *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire, Vinegar Tom* has an ensemble cast and employs double-casting, though to a lesser extent. The original cast consisted of seven actresses and two actors who played a total of fourteen roles: one man playing four separate characters and two of the women playing two roles each. It is notable that Churchill does not indicate that any roles *need* to be double cast, only that it is "important that Kramer and Sprenger are played by women" ("Production" 69). In the original production Kramer and Sprenger were played by the actresses who played Ellen and Joan, which Churchill refers to as an "ideal" doubling because Joan and Ellen had just been hanged ("Production" 69).

This casting choice may be ideal not only practically but also thematically. By repositioning the actresses as "Edwardian music hall gents" who deliver a song-and-dance diatribe against the weak, imperfect, and naturally deceitful feminine sex in the final scene of the play, Churchill and Monstrous Regiment draw the audience's attention directly back to the victims of such philosophies. The victims are thus re-embodied as the victimizers, causing a disruption that makes an explicit point about the relationship between gender and power by providing a physical representation of

women controlling their own bodies that is in direct contrast to the lack of control that has been shown throughout the play. According to Kritzer, "the role doublings enact a play of possibility that displaces the attitude of resignation that Brecht called 'the mark of the inevitable'" (*Empowerment* 95).

In this way, and in others throughout the play, the emphasis on controlling women's bodies is central to *Vinegar Tom* in a more tangible way than in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire.* Among other things, Churchill examines the ways in which motherhood becomes a fundamental agent in the struggle for such control, whether it is the ostracizing of single mothers (Alice), or the vilification of midwives (Ellen) or mothers whose children die (Susan).

In scene five, a scene that is reminiscent of the Claxton's Wife/Hoskins scene in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire,* two women debate the socially accepted view that women suffer because they are inherently sinful, illustrating the church's influence on women's perceptions about themselves. Alice, a single mother, has gone to the cunning woman, Ellen, for a charm to keep her from getting pregnant again. Susan, married with three children, the youngest of whom is not yet a year old, and another on the way, not to mention three miscarriages, believes that not only birth control but also seeking remedies to relieve the pain of labor is immoral because

> They do say the pain is what's sent to a woman for her sins. I complained last time after churching, and he said I must think on Eve who brought the sin into the world that got me pregnant. I must think

> on how woman tempts man, and how she pays God with her pain having the baby. So if we try to get round the pain, we're going against God. (19-20)

Similar to many of the women in *Light Shining*, Susan's beliefs, and her acceptance of her subordinate position in society, stem from the construction of women as inherent sinners, based largely on the teachings of the church. Like Brotherton, Susan struggles throughout the play with her fear of challenging authority, be it God, the church, her husband, or the witch-hunters. Unlike Brotherton, however, Susan has no epiphany; rather, she becomes increasingly convinced of her wickedness throughout the play.

Susan's conflicted feelings about her pregnancy and her choices about controlling her own body become clear when she goes with Alice to visit the cunning woman. When Ellen offers her something to take to "be rid of [her] trouble, Susan says, "I don't want it but I don't want to be rid of it. I want to be rid of it, but not do anything to be rid of it" (31), emphasizing the trap that she is in physically, emotionally, and morally. By the end of the scene Susan relents, saying "Maybe I'll take some potion with me. And see when I get home whether I take it" (33). Susan's plight, and her obvious confusion and fear, suggests that women's control over their bodies is limited by both external and internal forces; her physical options are few, and her psychological dilemma compounds the difficult choice she faces.

This sense of a lack of agency becomes clearer the next time Susan appears

on stage. In scene thirteen, Susan reveals to Alice that she has miscarried as a result of drinking the potion, and she clearly regrets her choice. She fears her husband discovering that she is no longer pregnant, and has convinced herself that she is wicked. As the scene progresses, Susan's emotional state worsens; she cannot stop crying, and Alice can do little to console her.

> ALICE. Oh, Susan, you're tired out, that's all. You're not wicked. You'd have cried more to have it. All the extra work, another baby.
>
> SUSAN. I like babies.
>
> ALICE. You'll have plenty more, God you'll have plenty. What's the use of crying? (41)

Susan's grief over her choice indicates that terminating a pregnancy does not come without remorse. Nor does it come without physical repercussions. Susan's refrain "I'm so tired" throughout the scene reinforces both her emotional and physical devastation. Additionally, the bickering between Susan and Alice over appropriate behavior, particularly in relation to children and men, suggests that Susan's weariness stems from not only her recent decision to end her pregnancy but also her constant struggle to do the right thing by society's standards even at risk to herself.

By the end of the scene, Susan's guilt and self-loathing turn into an accusation of witchcraft against Alice, further illustrating her desire to distance herself from her choice. The subject of their conversation shifts from Susan's induced miscarriage to Alice's most recent lover. Alice makes a doll out of mud to represent the man who

has spurned her and plays at pricking him to bring him pain. Susan tries desperately to stop her, but when she snatches the doll away from Alice it breaks into pieces. Her fear of the consequences of her action become clear when Alice jokes that Susan has killed the man; Susan immediately turns the blame onto Alice, foreshadowing the coming witch trials. Ultimately, Susan's guilt is revealed to be not about the breaking of the doll but about taking the potion when she says, "little clay puppet like a tiny baby not big enough to live and we crumble it away" (43). Her behavior is directly connected to her own choices and her inability to accept responsibility for those choices because she cannot overcome the belief that she had no right to make such decisions about her own body.

Susan's response to her choice reflects the "contradictory feelings and the complexity of choice, both in an existential sense and in relation to social circumstances" that Sheila Rowbotham notes began to emerge in feminist writing on the topic of abortion in the late 1970s and early 1980s (82). Rowbotham goes on to say,

> Contradictions—gaps between desire and social reality, between aspirations and feelings—were . . . being raised within the process of political struggle . . . Trusting women to make their own decisions about fertility means also trusting women to comprehend the complexity of this rather new human possibility. Eileen Fairweather [in her *Spare Rib* article on women's responses to abortion] argued

> forcibly that we should not dismiss the ambivalence inherent in this process. (83)

By showing the intensity of such ambivalent feelings through the character of Susan, Churchill allows the audience to consider the potency of choice. 17th century women may have had fewer and less technologically advanced methods of controlling their fertility, but they had choices nevertheless. The play draws a parallel between the women in the world of the play and women of the present not in terms of methods, but in terms of access and prevailing social attitudes towards the subject, attitudes which in 1976 were volatile, as people petitioned for a bill to amend the Abortion Act (1967), calling for greater restrictions on legal abortions, while others protested the National Health Service's failure to provide safe abortions for women in certain, often low-income, areas, such as Brighton, Birmingham, and Leeds ("NHS Criticized" 3).

Susan's conflicted feelings ultimately contribute to her own condemnation as a witch, as she attempts to shift the responsibility for her choice onto other women. The witch trials begin in the following scene, and Susan, devastated by her miscarriage and the subsequent death of her youngest child, offers evidence against her friend Alice when the witch-hunter, Packer, asks if anyone can give clear proof that Alice is a witch. Susan tells Packer that Alice took her to the cunning woman, and that the two forced her to drink "a foul potion" (47) to terminate her pregnancy. She proceeds to describe the death of her infant daughter, saying that Alice

bewitched the child by sticking pins in a puppet, the mud doll from the previous scene. Unfortunately for Susan, her testimony leads to her own conviction, as well as those of Alice and Ellen, as Packer condemns her for being complicit, saying, "We'll prick you as you pricked your babies" (46-47). Susan's "failures" as a mother are thus used to convict her as a witch; that she was pregnant while still nursing a baby who was not yet one year old, in addition to raising two others, is not considered as a possible reason for her babies' failure to thrive.

Alice's conviction as a witch also hinges on her maternal role. Though the charges against her stem primarily from Jack's claim in scene fourteen that she "bewitched [his] organ" (45), Packer's interrogation of Alice in scene seventeen focuses on what he considers her irresponsibility as a single mother.

> PACKER. How could a mother be a filthy witch and put her child in danger?
>
> ALICE. I didn't.
>
> PACKER. Night after night, it's well known.
>
> ALICE. But what's going to happen to him? He's only got me.
>
> PACKER. He should have a father. Who's his father? Speak up, who's his father?
>
> ALICE. I don't know . . .
>
> PACKER. Is the devil his father?
>
> ALICE. No, no, no.

PACKER. I'll have the boy to see me in the morning. If he's not the devil's child he'll speak against you. (54-55)

Alice's alleged endangerment of the child, "night after night," stems from her leaving him at home with her mother, Joan, a widow, who is also being tried for witchcraft. Alice's reputation as a loose woman, culled from her neighbors' gossip about her social (and sexual) activities, makes her a target for a society in which "the zeal to punish unmarried mothers was equalled only by the assault on witches" (Thurer 180). Alice's failure to conform to her society's definition of a good mother thus contributes to her vulnerability in the witch trials.

Packer's insistence that the child "should have a father" reinforces the perception that the non-traditional family unit of mother, child, and grandmother endangers not only the child but also the fabric of society. When asked in an interview about her thoughts on the "future of the family," Churchill states, "I think it is wrong if you feel the family has to be in the traditional form—authoritarian man and subservient women and children who will obey, and the whole family an instrument upholding an authoritarian society" (qtd. in Simon 130). Alice's child does, of course, literally have a father, but his absence, as well as Alice's refusal to name him, either because she does not know it or simply does not wish to reveal it, disrupts the accepted order of her community.

Packer's assumption that the child would be better off if a father were present ultimately reflects a greater concern for order than for women's (or children's) well-

being. Early in the play, Alice reaches the conclusion that she and her mother, as well as her son, are actually more secure without men in their lives. When Joan suggests that they would both be better off if they "got a man" (13), though not for the same reasons as Packer believes a man should be present in the home, Alice challenges her, saying, "You weren't better off, mum . . . think how he used to beat you," to which Joan replies, "We'd have more to eat, that's one thing" (14). The scene shows how limited the women's choices are; living as single women creates significant financial burdens, but marriage my create additional physical and emotional burdens. As Ned Chaillet notes in his review of the original production, "the women with men are not better off . . . living unloved with a husband or being married off to men they abhor" (11).

Furthermore, Packer's proclamation that the child's defense of his mother will prove her guilt dramatizes the illogic of the charges against Alice by exposing the no-win situation suffered by women accused of being witches. One naturally assumes that the child will proclaim his mother's innocence, and in doing so will seal her fate as a witch. Aston writes,

> Packer's cross-examination of Alice bears a frightening resemblance to the 1990s crusade against "lone mothers" and "home alone" children by right-wing politicians who, for example, have argued that it is "'good Christian doctrine' to stop single women having children before they . . . formed stable relationships," or have "defended the

> Government's right to speak out against the impact of single parenthood on crime and social breakdown." (*Churchill* 30)

This crusade was not limited to the 1990s, however, as similar sentiments appeared in the press throughout the 1970s and 1980s as well.

For example, in 1977 *The Times* reported that Britain's inadequate day-care facilities contributed to the growing numbers of "latch-key children," those who are left alone while their parents are at work, and that "most of the 'latch-key' children were in single-parent families who were caught in a painful dilemma between caring for their children and their need to raise living standards" ("525,000" 4). Yet the plight of latch-key children was not reserved for those from single-parent households, as the National Association of Schoolmasters and the Union of Women Teachers issued a report in 1977 arguing that children from double-income families were suffering because their working parents were "too tired to give them proper attention" ("Double-income" 2). Furthermore, according to an opinion poll conducted by *The Times* in February 1977, "a quarter of the working wives admit or fear that children of a working mother suffer. (A considerably higher number of men and stay-at-home wives also think so)" (M. Walters 13). Thus, though Aston suggests that Churchill was "anticipating crucial issues" (30) by dramatizing such social attitudes in 1976, warnings about single parenting and mothers working outside the home were prevalent at the time, indicating that Churchill was responding to the contemporary social climate regarding such issues.

Such sentiments are reflected in the refrain of the song "If Everybody Worked as Hard as Me," between scenes twelve and thirteen, which provides an ironic look at the conservative "family values" ideology that is often employed as a counter-argument to the goals of feminism.

> Oh, happy family.
> Oh, the country's what it is because
> the family's what it is because
> the wife is what she is
> to her man (38).

The traditional arrangement of the nuclear family, with women as homemakers and caretakers of children, requires that a woman's identity is linked to her husband, and women who fall outside of this standard are seen as a threat to the society. The song is set between two scenes in which the primary accusers, the married couple Jack and Margery, gather evidence against of witchcraft against Joan and Alice, the two characters who represent women who fall most outside the boundaries of accepted social norms. The placement of the song thus emphasizes the connection between Joan and Alice's status as unwed, working class mothers and the perceived threat they pose to their society.

Vinegar Tom suggests that such threats do not come from only the working-class, however. The character of Betty, according to Churchill a late addition to the cast to "[fill] the need that had come up in discussion for a character under pressure

to make a conventional marriage" ("Author's Note" 67), demonstrates that the quest for control over women's bodies does not recognize class boundaries. Betty is the daughter of the land-owner from whom Jack and Margery and the others rent their property. Margery's description of Betty as "always so soft on your lap, not like [our children] all hard edges. I could sit all afternoon just to smell her hair" (11) marks her as physically different from working-class women.

Nevertheless, Betty's social status does not provide her with more control over her own body. She tells Jack and Margery that she has escaped through a window after being locked up by her parents because she refuses to marry. When the audience next sees Betty, she is literally bound on stage, tied to a chair, and is being treated by a doctor. The doctor's explanation of Betty's illness is that she is hysterical because she is a woman. He says,

> Hysteria is a woman's weakness. Hysteron, Greek, the womb. Excessive blood causes an imbalance in the humours. The noxious gasses that form inwardly every month rise to the brain and cause behaviour quite contrary to the patient's real feelings . . . You will soon be well enough to be married. (24)

The biological explanation for Betty's refusal to participate in the prescribed customs of her society is tied directly to her reproductive abilities; her body is the cause of her illness, and it must, therefore, be controlled.

Despite the efforts to control her, Betty is spared being tried as a witch,

indicating that her position in society does afford her some privilege. In scene sixteen she tells Ellen,

> I'm frightened to come anymore. They'll say I'm a witch.
>
> ELLEN. Are they saying I'm a witch? . . . Nobody's said it yet to my face.
>
> BETTY. But the doctor says he'll save me. He says I'm not a witch, he says I'm ill. He says I'm his patient so I can't be a witch . . .
>
> ELLEN. You get married, Betty, that's safest.
>
> BETTY. But I want to be left alone . . .
>
> ELLEN. Left alone for what? To be like me? There's no doctor going to save me from being called a witch. Your best chance of being left alone is marry a rich man, because it's part of his honour to have a wife who does nothing. (50-51)

Betty, too, is in a no-win situation; she can lose her freedom or lose her life. As Ellen notes, however, Betty is luckier than most because she is protected by being under a doctor's care. Nevertheless, her range of choices are, like Susan's, significantly limited, suggesting that although class privilege provides certain benefits it does not necessarily provide for greater agency.

Like *Light Shining*, *Vinegar Tom* dispenses with ideas about female solidarity in the struggle for equality. The only women who appear to have some control over their own lives are those who conform to the society's standards and participate in

the persecution of other women. Margery, who, along with her husband, accuses Joan and Alice of witchcraft, is the most obvious example of a woman who rigidly adheres to the prescribed social order. She enjoys a security that the other women in the play do not because she devotes herself to running the household, focusing her energy on her duties as a wife, and conforming to the definition of that role.

Yet Margery is not a happy woman; her interaction with her husband reveals that her life as a wife and mother offers her no particular pleasure or comfort. Her children are not present in the play; she mentions them only once, and that is to compare them unfavorably to the "softer," upper-class Miss Betty. Her husband Jack calls her a "lazy slut" when she fails to get the butter to churn (18), and later in the play he reveals to Alice, "I'm no good to my wife. I can't do it. Not these three months. It's only when I dream of you or like now talking to you—" (22). Despite these less than ideal circumstances, Margery calls herself blessed in scene nineteen, praising God for saving her "in [her] struggle against the witches" as she watches Joan and Ellen hanged (57). Her victory seems hollow, and her prayer grotesque, in this context, particularly as she ends by asking that God make Jack "love [her] and give us the land, amen" (58). Though she is not a likeable character, she is pitiable; the audience recognizes that Margery only escapes a similar fate as a result of her willingness to accept her designated position in her society. As Chaillet suggests, "the oppressors might also be victims" (11), even if they do not recognize it.

In scene fifteen, Goody, an older woman working as Packer's assistant, serves

as a counterpoint to Joan; like Joan, Goody is a widow, but instead of borrowing from her neighbors, she seeks gainful employment in the form of witch-hunting. Goody delivers a monologue to the audience in which she praises Packer's skill as a witch-hunter, and she admits that "it's interesting work being a searcher and nice to do good at the same time as earning a living. Better than staying home a widow. I'd end up like the old women you see, soft in the head and full of spite with their mutterings and spells. I keep healthy keeping the country healthy" (50). By not only conforming but also joining in, Goody aligns herself with a system that threatens women who are not very different from her. She notes that, surprisingly, she earns as much as Packer does for every witch they find; her survival comes at the expense of other women.

Even at the end of the play, some of the accused women are against each other, suggesting that victims do not always find solidarity with one another. As they watch Joan and Ellen's execution, and await their own, Alice and Susan engage in their final debate. As in *Light Shining*, this final exchange, the last scene in which the main characters of the play appear, simultaneously presents resignation and resistance. In contrast to *Light Shining*, however, the women in *Vinegar Tom* do not reverse their positions; rather, Susan finally acquiesces completely to authority, and Alice rebels against it more vehemently than ever before. Susan's fear of challenging authority, and of burning in hell for her sins, overtakes her to the point that she says, "I was a witch and never knew it. I killed my babies. I never meant it. I didn't know I

was so wicked" (58). Susan's expression of gratitude to Packer for showing her the road to redemption creates a sharp sense of defeat, for the victory of the witch-hunter lies not in his taking the lives of innocent women but in convincing them that they are, in fact, responsible for their own demise. Alice, however, refuses to admit to being a witch. In a final show of defiance, Alice proclaims, "If I could live I'd be a witch now after what they've done . . . If only I did have magic, I'd make them feel it" (59). Alice's desire to become a literal threat to the society that has ostracized her for existing outside accepted boundaries, and her willingness to move even further away from cultural norms by becoming something which even she fears, suggests a path to resistance.

The final scene of the play produces the most complicated disruption in the representation of history in *Vinegar Tom*. As previously noted, the scene repositions 15th century theorists Kramer and Sprenger as Edwardian music hall performers, deliberately played by actresses in drag. The words of their routine, taken directly from their treatise on witches, declares that women are inherently inferior in both mind and body, but their primary fault is that they are sexually insatiable. Though in her 1976 review of the play Michelene Wandor writes, "[the songs] imply a simplistic one-to-one correspondence between the condition of seventeenth-century women and women today" (38), Amelia Howe Kritzer points out that "the introduction of another historical period as counterpoint to both the seventeenth century and the present further serves to invalidate a simplistic opposition between past and present

in attempting to understand gender oppression" (*Empowerment* 91). I would extend Kritzer's reading to suggest that the play actually introduces two additional periods in the Kramer and Sprenger scene, the 15th and late 19th/early 20th centuries, generating a sociological precedent for the action of the play through the medieval text and a physical manifestation of the perpetuation of those philosophies beyond the world of the play through the Edwardian style in which the text is performed.

The final moment of the play, the song "Evil Women," undercuts Kramer and Sprenger's song and dance by allowing contemporary women to have the final word. The lyrics focus primarily on sex and cultural representations of women:

> Evil women
>
> Is that what you want?
>
> Is that what you want to see?
>
> On the movie screen
>
> Of your own wet dream
>
> Evil women . . .
>
> If we don't say you're big
>
> Do you start to shrink?
>
> We earn our own money
>
> And buy our own drink.
>
> Did you learn when you were dirty boys, did you learn
>
> Women were wicked to make you burn?

By alluding to Kramer and Sprenger's charges against women, particularly that women are "more carnal" and are to blame for being temptresses, the song emphasizes the historical trend toward fetishizing women. By inserting themselves into the discussion, "If you like sex sinful, what you want it us" (63), boldly identifying themselves as witches, the performers are able to reclaim the image of the witch and ultimately thwart Kramer and Sprenger's position. It is the final step in regaining control over their own bodies.

Furthermore, by centering on the fear that the women are out of control if they can provide for themselves, the song draws an explicit connection between women of the present and the women in the 17th century world of the play. Topical references to the Equal Pay Act ("we earn our own money") and the point about women buying their own drinks, perhaps alluding to the controversy over the Fleet Street wine bar El Vino's refusal to serve women drinks at the bar, even after the Sex Discrimination Act was passed in December 1975,[24] bring the audience back to the present. By ending the play on such an immediate note, a moment in the present rather than the past, Churchill and Monstrous Regiment offer a direct challenge to the audience, providing no answers but raising provocative questions about women, power, and history.

***Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*: Motherhood & Sacrifice**

Pam Gems's *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* was originally produced at the Edinburgh Festival in August 1976 under the tile *Dead Fish*. Its London run was at the

Hampstead Theatre Club in December, and the play subsequently transferred to the Mayfair Theatre in February 1977. Its American premiere was in 1978 at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles.

The two-act play is episodic, and time is telescoped to cover what seems to be the span of a few weeks, though the actual timeline is never explicitly stated. Musical links play a significant role in the transitions between scenes, and in the original production, at the Edinburgh Festival, these links were played by live musicians. The stage directions at the top read: "*A space, not naturalistic. Neutral in atmosphere . . .*" (49). Yet the style of the scenes is, for the most part, naturalistic, though Fish breaks the fourth wall once to deliver a monologue. There is also a tableau in the penultimate scene of act one that provides an image of the women in fabulous costumes, as they have been playing dress-up together. This image is important thematically, as it is one of the few moments in which all four characters appear united (and happy), and it disrupts the realism of the piece by drawing attention to the performance of gender.

Like *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar Tom, Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi* has a communal quality; there are no lead characters. However, it is different in that there are no male characters present on stage, placing the focus more directly on the position of women in society. It is also important to note that although children figure in many conversations, they never actually appear on stage, either. Early in the play, Dusa, the only character who has children, puts a picture of her children by the

divan. At the end of the play, when Stas, Vi, and Dusa return from retrieving Dusa's recovered children to find Fish dead in the flat, Stas orders Dusa to keep the children out of the room. Of course, it is convenient to leave the children off stage for practical castings reasons, but it also works thematically to place the emphasis on the individual women's relationship with motherhood rather than on their relationships with children.

Like Churchill's plays, Gems's makes connections between the past and the present, particularly as it relates to issues of choice and sacrifice. The action of the play is set in the 1970s rather than in a previous historical period, but Fish's monologue about Rosa Luxemburg[25] near the end of act one introduces an historical element into the play, explicitly connecting women in the past to women in the present. After providing a gloss of Luxemburg's biography, noting her fight for socialism, commitment to the working class, and staunch pacifism, Fish breaks off the history lesson and addresses the present moment. She says,

> It's not enough to be told that we may join in . . . that they will let us in . . . when they need our labour force. To be outside may be oppression. To be inside may well be total irrelevancy. It's not just a matter of equal pay . . . equal opportunity. For the first time in history we have the opportunity to investigate ourselves . . . for the first time in history . . . we are more than the receptacle for genetics. . . The nature of the social and political contribution of women is, at this

moment, wholly in question. (55)

Fish delivers this monologue directly to the audience, "*as on a platform*" (55), disrupting the naturalistic style within the scenes that has been observed up until this point in the play. By highlighting Fish's speech in this way, Gems leads the audience to consider the ways in which women's options have been restricted historically, specifically as they relate to money and class, which are at work in the world of the play, a reflection of her own society.

Gems says that "the crux of the play, for me, was the Rosa Luxemburg speech. To some extent I modeled Fish on her, since Rosa was a middle-class woman who took the path of socialism . . . and gave her life for it" ("Dusa" 71). In this way, though Luxemburg is not technically the subject of the play, she takes on a central role in it.[26] By placing a discussion of this historical figure at the center of the play, and by creating an analogy between the character Fish and the historical figure, Gems manages to make history critical to *Dusa, Fish, Stas, and Vi*. In later works she foregrounds the historical by making the principal characters in her plays historical figures who could be considered analogous to contemporary women.

By juxtaposing the past and the present, *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* suggests that social conventions and political institutions have historically oppressed women, often by curtailing their ability to be both producers and reproducers. Fish says about Luxemburg,

Rosa never married Leo. She never had the child she longed for. The

> painful hopes in the letters from prison were never to be realised. She writes to him from Zurich about seeing a fine child in a park, wanting to scoop him up in her arms and run off with him, back to her room. Usually when people write about her nowadays they leave all that out. They are wrong. *She smiles, goes.* (Gems, *Dusa* 55)

Through the figure of Rosa Luxemburg, Gems provides a link between early and late 20th century women's involvement in social revolution and their roles as mothers/non-mothers/potential mothers, particularly as Fish's statement challenges those who deliberately obscure Luxemburg's desire to become a mother because it does not fit their personal and political agenda, suggesting that contemporary dismissals of "mother" as a valuable role for women is tantamount to the erasure of women from history. All women are seen as potential mothers, regardless of their actual ability or desire (or lack thereof) to become mothers, and are subject to social and political oppression as a result.

Each of the four main characters, the women of the title, comes from a different social class and represents a different segment of Gems's society. Despite their individuality, they represent a community, albeit an often inharmonious one. Though several critics suggest that the play presents a "positive reflection on women's community" (Rudolph 107), the sisterhood at times seems shallow. Though Keyssar argues that the "absence of deceit and manipulation among them serves as a model for how women might be together" (133), a troubling tension

between selfish and selfless behavior exists in the play.

For example, Fish provides a place for everyone to live, and she laments the loss of "the group" in society (59), but throughout the play she becomes increasingly self-absorbed. Her political beliefs and her personal choices do not always seem to be in accord. In the opening scene, Dusa reveals that Fish failed to show up to support her in court. When Fish arrives, she admits that she forgot the court date because, before the action of the play begins, she eloped with "some gink" on a whim to spite her former lover, Alan, who has taken up with another woman (51). She has subsequently left her new husband without even saying goodbye. As she becomes progressively more obsessed with Alan, Fish withdraws from her friends entirely. Though Keyssar notes the absence of deceit, and Dusa insists that "Fish never tells lies" (64), Fish does lie to her friends incessantly in the second act of the play. She invents stories about Alan following her, when in reality she is following him, and she says she's begun a relationship with another man to get Dusa to stop checking up on her.

Of course, Fish is not fooling the other women, so she is not truly "deceiving" anyone, nor does she lie to hurt her friends in any way. Yet the fact that she feels she cannot share her pain with them suggests that they cannot provide her with the comfort she needs. Dusa's motherly approach alienates Fish, who says, "I get the notion that you're keeping an eye on me. It's unnerving . . . It's just that when I think you're trying to . . . look after me, it gives me ugly thoughts" (65).

Stas's no-nonsense approach is equally alienating.

> VI. You wanna watch out for yourself mate.
>
> STAS. Right . . . I mean it. Because if you don't, somebody has to do it for you.
>
> FISH. I'm not asking for help, I never have. I wouldn't dream of it.
>
> STAS. No. Not your role, is it? (63)

Fish struggles to find her own way through her crisis, partly because her insistence on independence prohibits her from asking for help. As Dusa notes in the preceding scene, "People think Fish is OK because she hides behind this sort of . . . manner" (60).

The previous exchange leads to the most overt ideological argument between Stas and Fish, foregrounding a tension that runs below the surface throughout the play. Fish, who has "all the natural authority and self-confidence of the upper-middle classes . . . from a background of intellectuals," has "attached herself to a political group on the left" (47). Stas, the "daughter of a farmer" (47) and a physiotherapist who earns extra money as a call girl so that she can study marine biology in Hawaii, does not buy into Fish's socialist agenda. At one point, Stas refers to Fish derisively as "Mrs. Pankhurst" and dismisses the "breed" of people whom she perceives to be more talk than action (60).

Gems introduces Stas's disdain for Fish's politics in the scene that immediately follows Fish' speech about Rosa Luxemburg. Stas and Vi discuss Fish's

pursuit of Alan, and the conversation quickly turns into an examination of Fish's political commitment.

> STAS. She should give him the push. What's she trying to prove? She can slum as much as she likes, she's never going to be one of the workers.
>
> VI. She takes it very serious.
>
> STAS. Upper class twit, they're always the worst.
>
> VI. Shut up . . .
>
> STAS. [You've] fallen for it.
>
> VI. What?
>
> STAS. The charm. Lady Fucking Bountiful . . . Forty-hour week revolutionaries . . . then it's country house time. Makes you sick.
>
> VI. I'm not jealous of her.
>
> STAS. Well, I am.
>
> VI. What for?
>
> STAS. I wanna be rich.
>
> VI. Yeah? What about the workers?
>
> STAS. I am the workers. (55)

By placing this conversation directly after Fish's platform speech about socialism and feminism, Gems draws attention to the class divide that exists in both the world of the play and in the past. Stas's identification as one of "the workers," and her

suggestion that Fish's activism (like Luxemburg's) is a convenience afforded by her middle-class roots, highlights the ways in which access to things such as education, employment, and financial freedom shape the women's understanding of their place within the social structure, as well as their ability (and willingness) to participate in political activities.

Such conflicts, and the characters' difficulty in finding common ground, hint at the complex nature of feminism's various and varying goals. As Rowbotham suggests, "The range of political disagreement was considerable [within the feminist movement] but the situation was fluid and differences did not lead to large schisms until the late 1970s" (xii). In *Dusa*, the women's personal experiences affect their political engagement and philosophies. The characters' differing attitudes often reflect the ways in which their different class positions dictate their choices about careers, marriage, and motherhood, and highlight these ideological divides.

Throughout the play, the various opinions about motherhood serve to mark both material and ideological differences between the women. Dusa is the least connected to the group in some ways *because* of her role as a mother. A mother of two, she has just divorced her husband who, during the course of the play, leaves the country with their children, violating the custody arrangements by kidnapping them from Dusa's mother's house. Because she has been a housewife for several years, Dusa is unemployed; she, therefore, has no money of her own, which makes the task of getting her children back seem impossible. Her struggle as a newly single mother

suggests that women who have children have difficulty joining or returning to the workforce, and suffer financially, socially, and emotionally as a result.

Furthermore, because she is the only character in the play who has children, Dusa ultimately seems isolated in her struggle to retrieve her children, even though the other women try to lend support. She tells Stas and Vi, "You don't understand. You love them too much. It's unbearable . . . they can let go when they're ready. You can't . . . You're just an old balloon after the party" (64). By insisting that her identity is forever inextricably linked to her children, Dusa reveals, at least what she perceives to be, a fundamental difference between herself and the other characters.

The remaining characters in the play do not have children, and their attitudes about motherhood range from disdain to desire. Stas has no designs on motherhood; having children would get in the way of her work as both a therapist and a call girl. Vi, unemployed, from a working class background, says she has had multiple abortions and finds children repulsive. Stas and Vi find common ground in their disinterest in having children:

> STAS. Fancy having kids?
>
> VI. Me? Yich!
>
> STAS: Yeah, me too . . . weird. (67)

Their antipathy towards motherhood separates them both from Dusa at different times in the play, as both choose the topic of reproduction as a way to silence her or change the topic when she raises issues that they do not want to discuss. As a result,

Dusa's role as a mother directly affects her ability to engage in both personal and political discussions with other women.

The gulf between Dusa and Vi is apparent from the beginning of the play. Dusa enters the flat, where Vi is lying hidden on the floor, under a coat and a rug, watching television. Their clipped conversation moves quickly to a boiling point; Dusa has entered angrily because Fish forgot to meet her at court, and Vi's obtuse responses to her questions generate more questions than answers. Vi, increasingly frustrated by Dusa's intrusion on her space, finally lets out a shriek and backs herself into a corner that is "stacked with her belongings" (49). Dusa realizes that Vi now lives in the flat, and Vi's fear of being displaced become clear.

> DUSA. Are you living here now?
>
> VI. Yeah, why . . . you coming back?
>
> DUSA. With two kids?
>
> VI. (*alarmed*) Where are they?
>
> DUSA. On the doorstep—wanna babysit . . . they're with my mother! (49)

Dusa's joke about babysitting indicates that she is aware of Vi's disinterest in children. Later in the play, Dusa asks Vi if she would like to see pictures of the children. Vi responds, "Look, don't make me sick, I'm on uppers at the mo" (65). In both cases, though the tone is playful, it is clear that Vi not only has no interest in children of her own but also wants to maintain her distance from children in general.

Such playfulness, however, does not always inform their conversations. When Dusa questions the anorexic, agoraphobic Vi about her health, asking if she has seen a doctor recently, Vi manipulates Dusa's maternal feelings in order to change the subject. She says, "Not since me last abortion. I was seven months, it was ever so strong . . . you could hear it crying all the way to the incinerator" (50). Vi's joking comes at Dusa's expense; she knows that Dusa will react violently to this graphic description. Dusa's "murderous" silencing of Vi is capped by her placement of a picture of her children on an end table, and Vi is thus able to avoid confronting her own physical and emotional crises (50).

Stas's attitude about motherhood is less antagonistic than Vi's, but she, too, uses it to gain the upper-hand in an argument with Dusa. When the two debate Fish's political commitment at the beginning of act two, Dusa becomes frustrated by Stas's emphasis on science, saying, "Oh, theories. I'm talking about people" (61). Stas's response is to discuss cloning, suggesting that, because science allows for the replication of people, biological reproduction, and thus motherhood, has become redundant. Stas's pragmatic scientific approach marks her as different from Dusa, whom she calls at one point "the earth mother" (70), though at times it seems to act merely as a shield against the disappointments she faces as a working-class woman.

Fish, however, expresses, at various points in the play, an interest in having children. Yet because her ideas about motherhood are rooted in fantasy and desire rather than physical reality, she is still separate from Dusa in terms of experience.

For example, early in the play she tells Dusa that her former lover, Alan "all of a sudden . . . wants a house and garden. We should have had a child! I should have done it last autumn, we both wanted it then" (52). She goes on to say that she refused at the time because she thought that Alan merely wanted to "shut [her] up" (52), a point with which Dusa, speaking from her own experience, agrees, "Oh, it does that all right" (52). Fish is not willing to sacrifice her freedom, or her work, for motherhood and marriage.

By the end of the play, however, the intensity of Fish's desire to have children, and her unwillingness to accept the limitations she feels have been placed upon her, becomes clear. After discovering that Alan's new wife is pregnant, Fish commits suicide. Her suicide note is read aloud by Stas, the final words of the play:

> It's hard. I wanted so much to sit under a tree with my children and there doesn't seem to be a place for that anymore, and I feel cheated. I've been seething with it for more than two years, but now I'm tired and it's not important anymore. I don't feel fertile
> anymore . . . My loves, what are we to do? We won't do as they say anymore, and they hate it. What are we to do? (70)

The fantasy of sitting under a tree with her children in Fish's suicide note links her to the childless Luxemburg wanting to scoop up the "fine child in [the] park," solidifying the historical connection between the past and the present. Fish's inability to reconcile her public and private lives, like Luxemburg's, suggests a loss of

hope for the possibility of change, creating a sense of defeat in the final moment of the play that many critics, such as Michelene Wandor and Sarah J. Rudolph, point out.

The implications of Fish's defeat, however, are subject to different interpretations. Wandor writes in *Carry on, Understudies*,

> There is an implicit judgement [sic] that political commitment either blocks people from coping with their emotions, or makes them even more vulnerable to their own moralism . . . Matters are compounded by the fact that as far as one can tell Fish is not a feminist and therefore has no theory other than her mechanistic socialism to fall back on. The play asserts the dilemmas without exploring them. (164)

Yet Rudolph concludes that Fish's suicide represents "not . . . failed political ambition, but the death of a naiveté about change in men and women's relationships" (109). My own reading of Fish's choice is akin to Rudolph's; Fish's political beliefs center on the need for significant changes to the ways in which society imagines men and women's roles, both privately and publicly. Her proclamation that it is "time to change the rules" (59) suggests that notions of equality depend not on fitting women into the already existing structures, but on restructuring the system altogether.

In 1982 Gems wrote,

> To my surprise, the piece aroused some controversy, because of the

> suicide of the political activist, Fish. It was felt, by some people, that his was a slur on the left, and that the play was thereby bourgeois and individualistic . . . It seemed to me when I was writing the play that for all the rhetoric, and the equal opportunities, and the Sex Discrimination Acts, that society had not moved one step towards accommodating the other fifty percent of us and our needs . . . to be told, as women, that we were to be allowed to "join," as fully fledged citizens was one thing. How we were supposed to do it, and breed and rear our young . . . well, we've seen the result of all that. ("Dusa" 71)

Gems, in both this statement and in the play, criticizes society for the limitations it places on women's options, and her thoughts sound strikingly similar to Fish's Luxemburg monologue in the play. Gems focuses on the fact that women's choices are manipulated by a social structure designed to control them.

None of the women in the play seems to be fully satisfied; each has to make a sacrifice. Keyssar writes,

> Each of the . . . women has narrowed her desires and commitments: Stas commits herself to her profession, Dusa to her children, Vi to her body. Fish is greedier than the rest, less willing to settle for what she sees as half a life. (134)

The last scene in which Fish speaks reveals this "greed"; she tells Dusa, "There's got

to be a new deal for us . . . none of the either/or, 'You, too, can have a career and five abortions in the name of progress.' That's a fashion I'll leave out. We have to break new ground. Together" (69). Fish's comment suggests that despite the passing of laws and the superficial attempts at providing equal access to jobs, women are still forced to compromise in ways that men are not, and abortion is not the solution that every woman seeks. Fish would like to imagine new possibilities for working together, women and men, to solve the problems, to make actual progress by bringing about true change.

It is her drive to seek new ways of imagining the roles of men and women in society, by finding ways to compromise that involve less sacrifice, that marks Fish as a feminist. Though Wandor suggests that Fish's socialism is "mechanistic" and lacking in terms of a feminist perspective, her agenda clearly includes a focus on women's rights. In act one she enters reading a newspaper and says,

> Listen to this. 'The management conceded that the female labour force were not excessive in their demands and that there had been faults in communication.'
>
> DUSA. What?
>
> FISH. It means they've given in, love . . . It was great, you should have seen us. Solid. Not a tit wobbled . . . We won. All those sanctimonious union bastards trying to buy us camparis . . . I'm amazed. They're putting in a shift system to fit round school hours,

and a creche.[27]

DUSA (*frowns, apart, disapproving*). Creche?

FISH (*not hearing*). Yes, great isn't it?

DUSA (*apart*). No.

FISH. Well, it's a start. (57-58)

Fish's commitment to establishing better conditions for working women, especially working mothers, is a feminist one, and it is one that was very central to women's quest for equal opportunities in the 1970s in the UK.

Day care, in particular, was a pressing issue at the time. In an Op-Ed piece in *The Times* in 1976, Dr. Hugh Jolly writes, "mothers who decide to return to work while their babies are still young should not be made to feel guilty" (9), and notes that he " would like to see hospitals and factories taking sufficient interest in the children of their employees to provide [day nurseries/nursery school]" (9). (Much like Robert Owen, who created a "utopian" community for his factory workers in 19th century Scotland, provided for his employees' children.) Another article from December 1976 claims that "the lack of any coherent policy to provide suitable day care for children of working mothers has led to inadequate and poor-quality provision" ("Many Mothers" 4). Considering the prevalence of the problem in England at the time, Fish's activism seems directly connected to socialist feminist efforts to improve equality in the workplace.

It is interesting that Dusa is the one who has the most negative response to

daycare. She does not elaborate, but the suggestion—derived from comments she makes in the play, such as wondering if both parents go off to work, "who gets left wiping the baby's bum?" (58) or noting that "nowadays . . . big deal . . . you can retrain . . . become a computer data programmer . . . see life. No, [raising children is] a tough act to follow" (64)—is that she would prefer to be home with her children than to leave them in daycare while she is working because though the experience of motherhood as work is demanding, it is also fulfilling.

Nevertheless, near the end of the play Dusa tells Fish that she will get a job; as a single mother she doesn't have much of a choice, and daycare will become a necessity for her and her children's welfare. Thus, though she does not necessarily want to use such a system, access to it will, ideally, help her survive as a single parent.[28] By the end of the play, Dusa's sacrifice shifts, even if her devotion is still primarily to her children. Her divorce disrupts her choice to be with her children; she cannot have the life she wants. Nevertheless, she will survive. Because she has reclaimed her children by the end of the play, and because Stas and Vi have joined her in this enterprise despite their apparent lack of maternal camaraderie, one gets the feeling that with the support of others, difficult though it may be, Dusa will try to balance motherhood and work as an unmarried woman.

Similarly, Stas's devotion to her profession undergoes a shift near the end of the play. Though throughout most of the play Stas seems to have a rather cavalier attitude about moonlighting as a prostitute to fund her career goals, her unhappiness

is evident when she makes a show of presenting her plane tickets to Hawaii to Dusa and Vi, saying, "Hardly dented the roll . . . (*She sighs with relief.*) No more appointments after this month. Only two quickies tonight" (66). Yet she cannot bring herself to leave the flat to keep those appointments; the toll her choices have taken on her is marked physically when she "*crosses to the wardrobe . . . to find something to wear, can't be bothered and slips a fur coat over her trousers and bare torso and goes, quietly*" (66). Stas has finally achieved her goal, but the cost of the achievement is not lost on her.

The scene also reveals Stas's conflicted feelings about her drive to pursue her career as a marine biologist. She shares with Dusa her fantasy of settling down for a life in the country, saying,

> There's a place at home I always go to . . . dunno why. Near a great big turkey oak. It's not worth anything, the wood's no good . . . Quite nice in the spring. A few primroses. I don't know why . . . it's not pretty or anything. (*Her voice breaks slightly.*) (66)

Her sudden revelation of an interest in nature, as opposed to science, belies the facade of the detachment that has characterized her throughout most of the play. Because Stas's reflection on this idyllic, albeit "worthless," spot comes in response to Dusa's inquiry about finding a flat in their current neighborhood, one gets the sense that Stas is tired of the compromises she must make in order to meet the financial demands of urban life. Her desire to retreat to her rural childhood suggests that she is coming to desire a quiet life, without fabulous fur coats and rolls of money.

Even Vi appears to have had a recognition by the end of the play that will stimulate a change in the way she negotiates the challenges of her life. For most of the play, Vi lacks a sense of focus; her identity seems to be in flux. Her various ailments—anorexia, agoraphobia—indicate that she has difficulty finding her way; she is lost in the world. As Sylvie Drake suggests, Vi represents the "remaining alternative: withdrawal from life into perpetual immaturity" (1). Yet despite Vi's self-destructive tendencies, she manages to get her life under control by the end of the play, as she enters the penultimate scene wearing a traffic warden's uniform, signaling her return to the outside world. The audience is left with the feeling that Vi, like Stas and Dusa, will rise to the challenges she faces and will survive, primarily because the three women have come gradually found a way to come together over the course of the play, indicating that they will continue to provide support for each other in the future.

Furthermore, Gems throws a more recent history into relief by having both Stas and Fish reflect on the sacrifices their own mothers made in order to survive. Stas's rumination on a life in the country begins with her statement, "Funny really. I've always thought my mother a rather boring woman" (66), suggesting that for the first time she considers the possibility of her mother having aspirations beyond her life on the farm. Stas's explicit desire to be rich has required certain sacrifices that her mother was, perhaps, not willing (or able) to make. Fish's suicide note also touches on the sacrifices of the previous generation; she writes, "Please try and

explain to my mother. I know it will be hard for her to understand because she stuck it out" (70). By invoking the immediately preceding generation of women, Gems allows the audience to consider the ability of women to be resilient despite the difficulties they have historically faced in terms of gaining equal footing in structures that are not designed to accommodate them.

Thus, because the other characters seem to be imagining new ways of surviving, and because there is a reminder that generations of women before them have found ways to fight on, Fish's resignation through suicide does not necessarily signal defeat. Keyssar argues that although the "positive construct" of community that is created throughout the play makes Fish's suicide particularly shocking for the audience, Fish's suicide is not "a cynical or defeatist gesture but a powerful reminder to the audience of the limitations of individual effort and the insufficiency of the liberation of women as a separatist endeavor" (134). Though Fish has given up because she fails to see a way out, the play leaves the audience with the feeling that the others will manage to muddle through. They might not always like what they have to do, but because each has come to recognize her sacrifices, there is a sense that each will be able to take control of those sacrifices rather than be victimized by them.

Arthur & Guinevere: Radical Revision

Produced at the SoHo Poly in 1976, Gems's play *Arthur & Guinevere* [29] is the most experimental of Gems's scripts that I have read. Though Ruby Cohn argues

that "most of [Gems's] work adheres to the conventions of realism, with emphasis on women's problems" (9), a point with which I agree to a certain extent, this play, particularly in the first act, actively disrupts the conventions of realism. Like many of Gems's plays, its central concern is "women's problems," and Guinevere's status as a mother figures prominently from the opening moments of the play.

The play critiques the traditional myth of Camelot, and works as a history play in the sense that mythology is a kind of history; it is culturally significant, and many people are familiar with the story. Niloufer Harben writes, "whether playwrights deal with historical subjects of varied nature and in diverse manner, whether these subjects have a basis in fact or myth, the distinguishing feature of the history play must be a concern for historical truth or historical issues" (20). As Harben goes on to note, the concept of "historical truth" relies on interpretation, and "the probable and the speculative will co-exist" (20). Thus, in re-imagining the story of Arthur and Guinevere, Gems presents a history that relies on the audience's knowledge of it and attempts to subvert the history by exploding the myth through structure and content.

There are only two characters in the play, Arthur and Guinevere. The first act consists primarily of two monologues, first Arthur's, then Guinevere's, with a brief exchange of dialogue in the final moments of the act. Guinevere is on trial for adultery, a charge for which the main evidence is that she has had a child in Arthur's absence. Since Arthur had been away for a full year, there is no possibility that he fathered the child, despite the midwife's testimony that the child "[lay] too late in the

womb. The nails of the baby Prince were an inch long" (4). Guinevere's role as a mother is this thus at the center of her crime.

Throughout the first act, Gems indicates in detailed stage directions various light and sound effects that represent Guinevere's alignment with the natural world. Though the stage directions indicate that "sometimes it seems that the King invokes the change, sometimes the Queen; at other times it threatens both" (1), the sun, wind, thunder, lightning, birds and other animals, seem to be most often under Guinevere's control as they punctuate Arthur's tirade against her, forcing him to concede points or change his approach at various points in his monologue. Thus, although there are only two characters present on stage, the audience is reminded of the larger context of the situation as the universe appears to respond to the action that transpires; the issues that Arthur and Guinevere discuss do not apply only to these people, nor do they apply only in this time and place.

Guinevere's connection to nature also establishes a difference between her and Arthur, reflecting a radical (or cultural) feminist philosophy that runs throughout the play. In *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Jill Dolan provides the following summary of cultural feminist theory:

> Because they can give birth, women are viewed as instinctually more natural, more closely related to life cycles mirrored in nature. Men are seen as removed from nature, which they denigrate rapaciously. Since women are nurturers, they are seen as instinctively pacifistic. Men, on

> the other hand, are viewed as instinctually violent and aggressive. Women are spiritual; men have lost touch with their spirit in their all-encompassing drive to conquer and claim. (7)

In *Arthur & Guinevere*, an emphasis on the biological differences between men and women emerges physically not only through the interventions of nature on Guinevere's behalf but also through the fact that there are only two bodies, one male, one female, on stage throughout the play. Furthermore, the descriptions of the characters' costumes suggest a marked difference between the characters; Guinevere in a flowing dress, "mild and decorous" (1) stands in sharp contrast to Arthur, "roughly dressed in leather and metal" (2). Michael Billington's description of Ann Mitchell's green fingernails in the original production suggests Guinevere's nature-goddess status, which is reinforced in the second act when Guinevere calls herself Queen of the orchard, moon, water, and sun (2.6).

In addition to the atmospheric interventions that support Guinevere and threaten Arthur, several of Guinevere's speeches in the second act emphasize her alignment with nature and his denigration of it. For example, when Arthur suggests that his kingdom needs to build more ships in order to improve trade, Guinevere says, "Not by cutting down my oak forests, you won't! You cut down one more tree and I'll put a blight on you that will shrivel your balls to peanuts!" (2.22). Because she claims the forests as her domain, and because her threat directly applies to Arthur's genitals, Guinevere reproduces arguments about fundamental biological

differences and their effect on men's and women's relationship with the natural world.

The characters' vocal qualities further emphasize the differences between them. Throughout most of the first act, Guinevere is silent, while Arthur often shouts; Arthur's loud "offensive" laughter contrasts with Guinevere's "infectious" giggling. Additionally, when Guinevere finally speaks for herself towards the end of act one, her pattern of speech distinguishes her from Arthur. Her lines are short, sometimes only fragments, with many gaps and pauses. Her argument for her own defense comes through natural imagery, such as descriptions of running on a marsh or being trapped in ice, instead of through a direct address of the charges against her. As a result, Guinevere's speech reads as poetry rather than prose, setting her apart from Arthur and suggesting both her disconnection from reality and her immersion in a different reality. Her speech ends with a scream, after which she "continues to moan softly and gently" (29). When Arthur concludes that his wife is "unfit to plead," Guinevere suddenly becomes more coherent and declares that she has been imprisoned not because of her adultery but because she is a woman.

Guinevere's understanding of her role as a reproducer takes a radical turn in the second act when she suggests to Arthur that men are unnecessary for the propagation of the population. Like Stas in *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi*, Guinevere suggests that the scientific process of cloning makes traditional reproduction unnecessary; yet whereas Stas seems to distance herself from humanity altogether by

her attachment to science, Guinevere's approach to the topic is explicitly pro-female. She tells Arthur,

> We don't need you, we don't need you, we don't need you! We can breed ourselves, women breeding women . . . not men . . . not men . . . men aren't needed. We can breed women on our own, but we can't breed men because men aren't needed. What do you think of that? . . . You can't do without us, but we can do without you! We can make as many Guineveres as we like. (2.27)

Guinevere's utopian vision of an all-female world is not the first feminist articulation of such a desire; Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 novel *Herland*, republished in 1979, imagines a community of women who spontaneously give birth when they reach the age of 25, producing only female children. Guinevere's vision, however, is rooted in technological rather than biological evolution, and Gems's imagining of a shift in the power dynamics attached to motherhood connects directly to actual scientific discoveries of her own time and place.

Scientific advances in reproductive technology, including efforts to clone human cells, were startling in the 1970s. In 1976, Caryl Rivers's article on genetic engineering in *Ms.* addresses both the emerging technique of in vitro fertilization and the simultaneous efforts to achieve "asexual reproduction, or cloning" (50). Much of this research was being conducted in Great Britain, at Cambridge University, and the first "test tube baby" was born in England in July 1978. In her companion piece,

"Cloning: A Generation Made to Order," Rivers writes, "The consequences of human cloning are almost impossible to imagine . . . The family would no longer exist, sexuality would have no connection with reproduction. The idea of parenthood would be completely changed. The diversity of human beings . . . would vanish" (51). Contrary to the fantasy of a tightly controlled reproductive world that produces only women, Rivers paints a bleak picture of the potentially disastrous ramifications of such selective reproduction.

Yet Guinevere's point about cloning is more directly related to issues of power and control than about truly wishing for an all-woman world. From the beginning of the play it is clear that her role as a mother has put her in a subordinate position. The need to control women's sexuality is linked to their reproductive abilities and anxiety over paternity. Because her newborn infant is the only concrete evidence of her crime, Guinevere's subsequent imprisonment and public trial are inextricably linked to her maternity. Her crime of infidelity cannot be hidden because the proof lives and breathes. Furthermore, the case against Guinevere threatens the future of Arthur's kingdom in a significant way. The charges against her, if found by the court to be accurate, mean that all of their children must be put to death because one proven infidelity immediately calls into question the legitimacy of all of the royal offspring.

Though at certain moments in act one it is clear that Arthur wants to protect his wife, he must maintain his public image. Guinevere's infidelity is particularly

embarrassing for him, and it undermines his authority as well. Arthur says,

> What is a woman but the reflection of her husband, the father whose dowry defines her? In the old days, what matter who got a woman's belly up so long as there were boys to drive the herd and girls to spin? But those times are past! We have emerged from incoherence . . . Here in this Kingdom we have order. (10)

Arthur's insistence on the importance of women's fidelity for the good of the society, and his subsequent claim that it is not "natural" for men to give up their freedom by being "tied down" by marriage, call attention to the double-standard that applies to attitudes about men's and women's sexual needs and desires. Arthur's physical attack on Guinevere throughout his speech about order, culminating with his comment, "We made the world—it's up to you to fit in" (11) upon releasing her from his grasp, illustrates the intensity of his need to control her.

Gems uses the trial format to dramatize power structures and the difference between men and women within those structures, pointing out the difficulties women have "fitting in." The evidence presented in Guinevere's defense, affidavits read aloud by Arthur throughout act one, is primarily a long list of atrocities against women, from genital mutilation to rape, that Arthur's government does nothing to curtail. For example, female circumcision practiced by the Moors who are under Arthur's rule is described graphically, emphasizing women's physical and psychological suffering that relates directly to sex and reproduction. Arthur argues

that such points are irrelevant to Guinevere's case, but these issues illustrate Guinevere's point that women have no real control over their bodies, or their sexuality, a fact that is central in her own case.

Gems, however, disputes the notion that the play is anti-male. In an interview with Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig from 1987, Gems says,

> I did a play, a two-hander, about Arthur and Guinevere, and fell over backwards to make the arguments fair and equal. I made Guinevere shallow, trivial . . . which Guinevere knows, and she knows why . . . it is because she, as a woman, has been kept out of the action. The critics, all male, dubbed the play unfair to men. (202)

Yet because Arthur strangles Guinevere, "knock[s] her about" (2.24), and threatens her with physical violence at various moments in the play, the fairness and the equality of the arguments, however debatable, are undermined by the characters' physical inequities.

In his review of *Arthur & Guinevere* in *The Guardian*, Michael Billington does, in fact, argue that the play is unfair to men, saying,

> I also wish Miss Gems showed a bit more respect for the male opposition. Lines like "Men don't love. You feel affection and desire but you don't love" are treated as self-evident truths instead of being hotly and vigorously debated. As in so much feminist drama, the air is heavy with the sound of dice being loaded. (10)

Though Billington notes that "Miss Gems writes well about the pain of being Guinevere," his feeling that because it is "transparently clear that the character is a symbol of female frustration down the ages" it is "peculiarly pointless to drag in modern references" (10) recalls his dislike of similar transparencies in Churchill's *Vinegar Tom*.

Gems addresses this negative attitude towards feminist drama in a 1977 interview in *Time Out*. Discussing her aversion to making *Queen Christina* too overtly feminist, she says, "people think that a feminist position is something that is going to be laid on them, like a kind of whingeing" (13). Caryl Churchill, among the other interviewees, replies, "But, Pam, I would have thought that your main interests tended to be with women as characters, their sense of role and what they're capable of. I think that's more thought of for you than for me, though I think it's more thought of me recently" (13). Though Gems concedes that she began writing plays with an eye toward answering the question "what is a woman?" she notes that men may be disenfranchised by social structures as well, albeit in different ways.

Despite the appearance of a binarized representation of men's and women's differences in *Arthur & Guinevere*, Gems also provides materialist critiques, in the sense that she shows "gender polarization as the victimization of not only women . . . [but also as] a social construct oppressive to both men and women" (Dolan 10), particularly in the second act of the play. The second act is a much more naturalistic exchange between the two characters as they move from the public space

of the trial into the privacy of Guinevere's bedroom. There is a significant shift in the power dynamic that accompanies the move from a public to a private one; act two allows the couple to engage in conversation and debate, away from the public eye, demonstrating the ways in which the existing social structure curtails the freedom of both men and women because in public Arthur may not show such an interest in his wife's opinions.

Furthermore, Guinevere seems to enjoy a certain level of power over Arthur in the private sphere that she does not in public life. Because the room is clearly her space, marked by her "silver throne decorated with moonstones and opal, and hung with drapery . . . light and airy and near to nature" (2.1), Guinevere gains an authority she lacked in the court. Her command of the space is further established as she manages to stop Arthur with nothing more than a stare as he enters the room "as though to attack her" (2.1). Throughout the second act, Guinevere's freedom to move about the space, and her ability to physically control Arthur within that space, draws attention to the shift of power.

Though there is undoubtedly a continued focus on the male/female dichotomy, there is also the suggestion that these positions need not be set in stone. Guinevere's main goal is to effect change by convincing her husband that women need to be given a more active and equal role in their society. Her position does not privilege women's experience, for she says, "It's not that we think we'd do better than you" (2.33); rather, she hopes to find a compromise in shared responsibility.

Her request for a seat on the council, "with an equal number of elected women" (2.26), is a significant part of her plan to initiate change, as she suggests that equal representation in the creation of laws would lead to more equitable social structures.

The call for more women in council is a direct connection to Gems's own society. In 1975, the *Times* reported that women were "seriously underrepresented in European politics," with women comprising less than 5% of the members of British Parliament ("British Call" 7). In 1976, Sir Alan Dawtry delivered a report to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in which he said "there were no woman chief officers in the whole of local government among finance officers, valuers, parks and leisure officers, engineers, surveyors, architects or environmental health officers" (Warman 3). In areas where women did hold positions as chiefs, such as education officers and housing managers, the percentages were often lower than 4 %.

Gems acknowledges the nominal presence of women in government, but challenges the kinds of compromise women have made to secure such positions of authority.

> ARTHUR. A few came forward, nothing special . . . a few Grannies in the Ministry of Health, nothing radical.
>
> GUINEVERE. First steps. Not that they weren't brave women . . . but they were so gratified to join that they played it your way . . . neat suits, dry manner and no visible bulges. But we do bulge! Half the world bulges! (2.26)

Guinevere's suggestion that in order to acquire power women must emulate male models in part by disguising their bodies, particularly birthing bodies, also resonates with issues that surfaced in 1970s England; in 1976 Labour MP Helene Hayman suffered negative publicity when she demanded daycare for MP mothers, with her infant son in tow (O'Brien 11). In 1979, when her seat on Parliament was being threatened by a (male) Conservative challenger, Hayman cut her long hair because her "glamour-girl image . . . irked some voters" (O'Brien 11). Regardless of the actual need to adopt a less traditionally feminine appearance in order to succeed, that a woman, an elected official, perceived such a need, and that an article with before-and-after photos showing the change was included in the "Election Special" section of the *Daily Telegraph,* suggests that women faced particular challenges in the political arena that were specifically linked to their gender.

Gems shows Arthur and Guinevere in a private world as husband and wife, imagining a world that exists behind the scenes of their well-known mythology. Sarah Rudolph suggests, Gems "suppl[ies] images from a romanticized past which perpetuate various western cultural ideas about gender. Gems appropriates these images to expose their complicity in the ongoing oppression of women" (*Revisioning* 87). Guinevere directly challenges such romanticized images of women in act two, saying, "Oho, can't have that, can we? The goddess, farting? The Myth, picking her nose? The Ineffable mother, pissing in the alley? No, no. Having been graced with the honour of chalicing YOU into life we must, naturally, be divine!" (2.11).

Guinevere wants equality, and her charge that the glorification of motherhood is not for the sake of women but for their sons, suggests that idealized roles are just as oppressive, if not more oppressive, than demonized ones.

The sound and lighting effects that punctuated the first act disappear while the two are in Guinevere's chamber, but at the end of the play, they return to emphasize the characters' return to the public world, suggesting that the agreements they have tried to reach as husband and wife will extend to the larger context of the society over which they preside as king and queen. The "brilliant sunshine" (2.45) in the final moment of the play, with Arthur and Guinevere standing side by side, contrasts with the rolling thunder that opened the play and suggests the possibility of positive change that may come from their attempts at renegotiating the structure of their society.

In *Arthur & Guinevere*, Pam Gems begins with a story that is much more familiar than the stories in her other history plays, and her reimagining of it is thus more disruptive to people's expectations about the characters and their story. By placing Arthur and Guinevere in the private sphere, she humanizes them; she challenges the construction of myths and legends by showing how such constructions inevitably lead to oppression by creating impossible standards for both women and men.

Conclusion

Caryl Churchill's and Pam Gems's plays from 1976 reflect the atmosphere of

change that was pervasive in the culture at large at that time. Though each play communicates this feeling through different structures and topics, all four plays act in some way as a call to action, embodying an intense desire for change, imbued with the spirit of revolution and rebellion. The topics considered in the play are immediate ones, and are shown to be historical ones as well through the playwrights' use of history either as setting or as counterpoint. According to Dominic Shellard, "Performers in the seventies wanted, above all, to be topical" (149), and the staging of history often served as a vehicle for investigating important topics of the time. For example, David Hare's *Fanshen*, produced by Joint Stock in 1975; Claire Luckham, C.G. Bond, and Monstrous Regiment's *SCUM* produced in 1976; Edward Bond's *Bingo* (1974) revived in 1976; and Roger Howard's *History of the Tenth Struggle*, produced at the ICA in 1976, are but a few of the contemporaneous plays that treat historical events or figures as a way to investigate their own time and place.

Mounting calls for improved conditions for women, legally and socially, publicly and privately, were at a high point in 1976, and this desire to change the way things were comes through in Churchill's and Gems's plays from that year. As the campaign for equal rights played out in reality, both playwrights wrote works in which that struggle plays out historically, often making explicit connections between the past and the present, indicating that the problems at hand were not new, but that new solutions were needed.

In 1977, Isabel Hilton's article "Women Make History" appeared in the

Sunday Times, providing a discussion of the then new field of "feminist history." In the article, history teacher Lenore Davidoff says the project of understanding women's place in history is "a question not just of using different source material, but of learning to ask a completely different set of questions" (qtd. in Hilton 13). Churchill's and Gems's plays from 1976 succeed in doing just that by constructing histories that not only imagine the voices of those on the margins of history but also promote inquiries into how those voices came to be marginalized, as well as the ways in which they continued to be.

The trend toward historical drama continued throughout the remainder of the 1970s, and both Gems and Churchill contributed important works to this genre. Several of Gems's plays became more traditionally historical, in the sense that they presented the story of an historical figure set in an historical period, whereas Churchill's became less rooted in the past than the two plays from 1976. Yet both would continue to experiment with structure, and both would continue to examine women's place in history and in contemporary society. Both would also continue to question the ways in which motherhood contributes to the definitions of women's roles within their societies.

Chapter 3

1977-1981: Motherhood and the Individual

Despite the emergence of the rebellious punk rock scene around 1977 and the continuing efforts of political groups with progressive social agendas, a steady trend towards conservatism picked up steam throughout the late 1970s. In an interview with Robert Eddison in 1978, Margaret Thatcher, preparing for her campaign for the position of Prime Minister, described the philosophy of the Conservative Party, saying, "Ours is a positive creed; in its philosophical beliefs it is a very ancient creed. We seek to promote, not destroy, the uniqueness of the individual" (16). She suggested that the ruling Labour Party was following a socialist agenda designed to "crush" the individual by creating a society in which people are totally dependent on the state. The intense focus on the importance of the individual increasingly dominated the cultural landscape, and by the 1980s it became the prevailing ethos.

People's mounting frustration with the economic crisis, unemployment, and the "seemingly unfettered power of organised labour" (Shellard 169) that gripped Great Britain led to Thatcher's election in May 1979. In 1978-1979, Britons endured what has been labeled the "Winter of Discontent" because of the "mass industrial unrest" (Shellard xvii) caused by workers' strikes in various industries, from railways workers to hospital workers to trash collectors. Even the *Times* newspaper staff was on strike from November 1978 to November 1979, and workers at the National Theatre went on strike in March 1979. As a result of the widespread labor crisis, the

Labour government fell in the general election in May, and Margaret Thatcher moved from Opposition Leader to first (and to this point only) female Prime Minister in British history.

Yet despite the shift in power from Labour to Conservative, and Thatcher's promises of egalitarianism, conditions did not get any better for workers, immigrants, the Irish, or women. As Catherine Itzin writes,

> At the end of the sixties, there had been revolutionary fervour at all levels of society, the feeling that things were changing and could be changed. At the end of the seventies, the forces were reactionary and showed signs of becoming positively repressive. The political climate was becoming increasingly unsympathetic to socialism and to socialist theatre. (337)

Capitalist ideology, nationalist sentiment, the culture of the individual, and a harkening back to Victorian values converged to create an atmosphere that paradoxically valorized the individual while simultaneously demanding conformity to prescribed ideals of good citizenship. Mrs. Thatcher's rallying cry, "We have got to get every person a capitalist . . . so that they can start with nothing and end up with something" (qtd. in Emery, "Every" 2), and her claim that Conservatism is "rooted in 'our religion,' which teaches 'that every human being is unique and must play his part in working out his own salvation'" (qtd. in Willmer 14) hint at the ways in which the Conservatives' emphasis on individuality "legitimized the idea of selfishness"

(*Maggie*) by linking self-sufficiency to profit, both financial and spiritual.

When the General Election approached at the end of the decade, Prime Minister Callaghan ran a campaign that insisted Labour was overcoming the growing unemployment crisis; he also suggested that a primary focus for his administration would be providing working mothers with "better nursery and childcare facilities and an effort to persuade employers to widen the range of jobs available" (Conyers 12). The Conservatives approached the topic by putting up posters showing a seemingly endless line of people at the unemployment office, featuring their clever pun of a campaign slogan: "Labour Isn't Working." It turned out that Conservatives worked even less, as by 1980 "unemployment [rose] above two million for [the] first time since 1938" (Johnson 502).

The Conservatives' campaign also played upon existing racial tensions at the end of the decade, promoting "a British nation with British characteristics" (Thatcher qtd. in Young, "Mrs." 32). In January 1978 Margaret Thatcher said on a television program that British people were "really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture" (qtd. in Kushner 422), a sentiment she repeated almost verbatim on a radio call-in show in 1979 (Conyers 12). Newspaper articles and editorials at the time criticized Thatcher's use of the "politics of fear" to gain support for the Conservatives' desire to institute stricter immigration policies (Heffer, "Politics" 18), a central part of their election campaign, which would be successfully put into law in the 1980s.

Such assertions of national identity affected not only immigrants coming from outside the United Kingdom, but also the Irish and the Scottish, countries which at the same time were growing increasingly nationalist in their anti-Englishness. The ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland was put, to some extent, in the background during the election period despite the significant increase in violence in the area. In April 1979 Prime Minister Callaghan said,

> British policy is to enable [the population of Northern Ireland to live in peace], to keep them together in one community as far as possible, to get agreement among the politicians there about the extent of the powers that can be devolved to Northern Ireland in such a way that neither community is threatened. When the election is over we will resume that task. (qtd. in Comfort 12)

Yet in December 1979, while visiting President carter at the White House, the newly elected Prime Minister Thatcher "pleaded for 3,000 handguns for the Royal Ulster Constabulary,"[30] which Carter declined to provide because he was "unwilling to antagonise ethnic minorities [in his own country] in an election year" (Brandon 5); Thatcher's request suggests that the problems in Northern Ireland were no longer on the back burner and that the solution involved a certain level of increasing aggression. Violence connected to the troubles in Northern Ireland, enacted by both pro-British and pro-Irish groups, against both civilians and soldiers, Protestant and Catholic, grew with alarming intensity at the end of the 1970s and continued into the

1980s.

In her January 1979 article "Don't You Know There's a War Going On?" Eileen Fairweather explores the particular difficulties faced by women in Northern Ireland as the result of the armed presence of the British Army and the RUC. She reports:

> After years of systematic discrimination, the bad housing and overcrowding [in the Catholic ghettoes] are phenomenal, and the unemployment in some areas is as high as 40%. Childcare facilities are next to non-existent—there's not one state nursery in the whole of Northern Ireland. Wages are far lower than in Britain, yet prices far higher: nearly 50% of women who go out to work earn less than £40 a week, while electricity, for example, costs 25% more. (20)

Furthermore, Irish Catholic women were regularly subjected to sexual intimidation, invasive body searches, and beatings while in custody, often being detained with no clear proof of any wrongdoing under the aegis of the Special Powers Act,[31] "emergency legislation applying in Northern Ireland [which] gives the army, police and government almost unlimited powers" (Fairweather 21).

Such special conditions for the legal handling of specific kinds of prisoners makes Margaret Thatcher's 1981 statement "crime is crime is crime, it is not political" seem somewhat specious, convenient in its allowance for the denial of "special treatment" for IRA prisoners who demanded prisoner of war status (qtd. in

Melaugh n.p.). Furthermore, that the "the deaths of several prisoners under interrogation in Northern Ireland have received only cursory and unquestioning mention" in the British press suggests an imbalance in the ways in which the conflict was represented at the time (Fairweather 22).

An example of such censorship on the subject of Northern Ireland is Caryl Churchill's experience with the BBC's airing of her documentary *The Legion Hall Bombing* in 1978. Churchill says,

> The only documentary play I've done was a television play about Northern Ireland, about a trial in the Diplock courts . . . there's no jury and only one judge. I had the transcript of a trial of a boy who was given sixteen years. A bomb had been planted in a British Legion Hall . . . and a boy walked in, put the thing down, and said "Clear the hall" and they all went out . . . nobody was hurt. The trial was extraordinary because there was no evidence to say the boy who was accused did it, except the police saying he'd confessed . . . There was no positive identification at all. We put a voice-over at the beginning and the end of the programme that explained the Diplock courts, and the BBC took it off because they said it was political comment, and put one of their own in different words, which they said was objective. (qtd. in Betsko 81)

Furthermore, "the BBC had first accepted the idea of a discussion to follow the play,

giving both sides the right to air the issues, but had later refused," and the father of the boy who was the subject of the documentary was "held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act when he arrived at Fleetwood, Lancashire, on Saturday night" when he arrived in Britain to see a preview of the play (Gosling, "BBC" 2). Though Churchill sought legal advice to help stop the BBC from airing the altered version of the play (Ferriman, "Author" 2), she was unsuccessful. The piece was aired with the BBC's revisions, but both Churchill and the director, Roland Joffe, succeeded in having their names removed from the credits, and the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society called for writers and directors to "withdraw their services from the BBC until a system is provided for appealing to an impartial adjudicator over censorship decisions" (Gosling, "BBC" 2).

Though Catherine Itzin writes that "Churchill was diffident about the function of political theatre and her function as a political playwright" (281), Churchill's belief that the BBC had distorted the meaning of *The Legion Hall Bombing* by revising it suggests that she did have specific goals in mind with this play (Fitzsimmons, *File* 40). Furthermore, her research into the project seems to have had lingering effects. Discussing the development of *Cloud Nine*, Churchill says,

> We did discuss the parallel between colonialism and the oppression of women . . . in our reading of Genet, in relation to Ireland. The way people think of the Irish is rather the way men tend to think of women—as charming, irresponsible, poetic creatures. (qtd. in

Thurman 57)

Besides linking colonialism and the oppression of women in *Cloud Nine*, Churchill calls attention to the troubles in Northern Ireland in the second act of the play; Lin's brother Bill is killed while serving in the army in Belfast, and his ghost appears in scene three. As in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, in *Cloud Nine* Churchill suggests that colonialism is oppressive not only to the Irish but also to the British soldiers who are assigned to enforce it and to their families.

In addition to the growing rifts between people in terms of class, religion, and ethnicity, tensions surrounding gender identification also increased. Prevailing attitudes about feminism were no less disquieting than they were at the beginning of the decade, and several articles in the mainstream press at the time focused specifically on women's rejection of the women's movement.[32] For example, Diana Geddes's 1979 *Times* article "The Feminist with a Yearning for Scholarship" presents a profile of Mary Moore, a woman who was going to take on the role of principal at St. Hilda's, one of the four remaining single-sex colleges at Oxford. When asked about co-education, Moore says,

> I am not a women's libber, but I am a feminist. A feminist is a woman who wants to succeed in a man's world, but who is definitely not anti-man. The long-lasting relationship between a man and a woman is, for me, the most rewarding thing in my life. My family will continue to be the centre of my life. (10)

Moore's affirmation of the traditional family structure privileges her domestic role over her public one, as her vow to keep her family at the center of her life indicates, as well as heterosexuality. The distinction she draws between "women's libbers" and "feminists" perpetuates stereotypes about women who seek "liberation" as man-haters. Furthermore, her desire to "succeed in a man's world" suggests accepting the terms of that world rather than aspiring to change them. Similarly, Margaret Thatcher's admission that "her husband hands out the housekeeping money each week although she is the family breadwinner [because, she says,] 'that is simply the way he was brought up. He would feel wrong if he didn't'" ("Romantic" 5) reinforces a desire to maintain "natural" roles, even when women have moved beyond those roles.

Though an opinion poll conducted by the *Times* in 1977 showed that approximately 77% of the men and women polled believed that "women's organisations and movements have helped to get women equality over the last five years" (M. Walters 13), statistics published in 1979 showed that "the proportion of women unemployed nearly doubled in the six years up to 1978, from 16 percent of the total unemployed to 29 percent" ("More Jobs" 2). Furthermore, Lady Howe, deputy chairman of the EOC, noted that "women had not only stopped making progress towards equal pay but were actually losing ground " as their "gross hourly income rose from 63.1 percent of men's in 1970 to 75.1 percent in 1976 . . . and have now dropped to 73.9 percent in 1978" ("Women 'Losing'" 17).

Working mothers continued to face discrimination in the workplace as well. Advancements that had been made in the early 1970s in securing maternity benefits for working mothers were deemed to have been working unsatisfactorily, prompting proposals in 1979 to amend the existing laws in ways that would make it more difficult for working mothers to be reinstated in their jobs after taking their leave (Baker 8). By 1980, an Employment Bill would be put into law that succeeded in instituting these changes.

By the end of the 1970s, the increased polarization of people based on their race, class, religion, and gender affected feminist thinking. Susan Bassnett writes that "universal sisterhood, the utopian ideal of women in the late 1960s and early 1970s gave way under the pressure of difference . . . what was happening was the reassertion of cultural difference, together with differences of class, race, and gender" (75). The social process of identity construction, how a person perceives her/himself and is perceived by others, became a central theme in both Gems's and Churchill's work during this period. Whereas the plays from 1976 focused largely on communities, the plays from 1977-1979 focus more directly on individuals who struggle to define themselves in relation to their societies.

With *Piaf* and *Queen Christina,* Gems hones the historical biography style for which she is best known, plays that focus on the tensions between the public and private lives of different figures from history. Gems's historical style is primarily structured around an individual who struggles with her position in society. Often,

however, there is one constant friend, so the protagonist views herself and is viewed by the audience in relation to that character. Though Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* retains a sense of ensemble that exists in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar Tom*, in this play Churchill manipulates cross-casting and the ensemble cast in ways that draw attention to the individual rather than suggest anonymity as these devices did in the those works. The previous plays used the ensemble to evoke a sense of specific groups of people in an historical situation that affected them as individuals but they ultimately represent something larger than themselves. In *Cloud Nine*, the audience gets a much deeper sense of the characters as individuals. Churchill says that in *Cloud Nine,* "For the first time I brought together two preoccupations of mine—people's internal states of being and the external political structures which affect them, which make them insane" (qtd. in Itzin 287).

All three of the plays discussed in this chapter focus to some extent on the relationship between those internal states of being and the external structures that shape them. Each focuses on an individual's, or several individuals', negotiation of her or his environment, and though each suggests that the road to self-discovery is long and hard, a sense of optimism emerges as a result of the characters' ability to reclaim their identities by the end of each play. That is not to suggest that everyone is fulfilled or blissful; Edith Piaf, for instance, dies in the closing moments of *Piaf*, but Gems's use of the song "Non, je ne regrette rien," though ironic on one level, confers power to Piaf over the external forces by suggesting a recognition of those

forces. In *Queen Christina* and *Cloud Nine*, there is a sense that because the characters will proceed with their new self-awareness they will be better able to negotiate the societal terrain, though both plays also insert reminders that there will still be hurdles along the way.

The playwrights make different uses of history during this period as well. Gems's two plays focus on relatively well-known women from previous periods, and are much more conventionally historical than the plays discussed in chapter one. Even though the overall structure of the plays is similar to her previous works—episodic, non-naturalistic settings—the historical world in each play is not disrupted by overt references to the present, as it is in *Arthur & Guinevere*. Both *Piaf* and *Queen Christina* follow a linear chronology of each woman's life, though some of the events in those chronologies are subject to revision; though the plays are historical, they are not documentary.

In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill moves further away from the style of a conventional history play by splitting the action of the play between two different centuries. She uses no historical source material, as she did in her two plays from 1976, and the style is less naturalistic than *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* or *Vinegar Tom*. Nevertheless, the play functions as a history play because in addition to the historical setting of act one, the second act is so firmly rooted in its own time and place that it is historical as well; furthermore the mingling of the 19th and 20th centuries at the end of the play "enables us to see history as knit into the fabric of our own time"

(Harben 255).

As a result of this shift of focus, these plays present a different approach to mothers and motherhood as well. In *Piaf*, Gems touches on motherhood in less direct ways than she did in her earlier works, but the question of idealizing motherhood still arises. As she does in the other plays, Gems suggests in *Piaf* that motherhood limits women's freedom to engage in active public lives, and active public lives limit women's freedom to engage in mothering. In *Queen Christina* and *Cloud Nine* there is an attempt to show the relationships between mothers and daughters that did not feature in the earlier works. Daughters struggle to be different from their mothers in various ways, and the sense of oneself as an individual is connected to this struggle. In *Cloud Nine* and *Queen Christina,* Churchill and Gems explode stereotypes about mothers by employing them in ways that appear at first to reinforce them, but eventually subvert them, allowing other characters, and the audience, to reach a recognition of challenges these women have faced, in part because of their roles as mothers.

Additionally, the plays from this period focus more directly on the practice of mothering—how characters can or cannot, do or do not, perform the job of mother according to their culture's definition of the role. Furthermore, the ways in which men experience fatherhood and motherhood emerges in relation to questions about the construction of gender identities in these plays as well. *Cloud Nine*, in particular, hints at the desire to imagine new configurations of the family, providing the

possibility for an expansion of the definition of mother.

Piaf: Isolation and the Fantasy of Motherhood

The kinds of biographical history plays for which Gems is best known were first produced in 1977 and 1978, after she had achieved critical and mainstream success with *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*, though the two plays from this period were actually written before *Dusa*. *Queen Christina,* written in 1974/5, was originally produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place in Stratford in October 1977, the first play written by a woman to be staged there. *Piaf,* written in 1973, was originally produced by the RSC at The Other Place, Stratford, in October 1978. It transferred to Broadway in February 1981, after a trial run in Philadelphia.[33] Both plays focus on the life of a real woman from a previous historical period; biography is used to draw parallels between the past and the present. As in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*, the characters' engagement with, or estrangement from, motherhood in these plays emphasizes the ways in which women's identities are informed by their willingness or ability, or lack thereof, to conform to the ways in which society defines their roles.

The issue is less central in *Piaf*, but still looming. As in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* and *Arthur & Guinevere*, children never appear on stage in *Piaf*, though they do figure in several conversations. Their absence in this case reinforces the theme of loneliness that pervades the play; furthermore, the constant reminder of a responsibility that lingers off stage for characters such as Toine and Marcel (and his

also absent wife) emphasizes the tensions between private and public lives. In reality, Piaf had a child who died at age two; in the play, Piaf often alludes to the dead child, changing the story she tells about her daughter as it suits her mood. Ultimately, Piaf's role as a mother is one of fantasy, and it becomes symbolic of the "difficulty for women of choosing between maternal interest and self-interest" that Elaine Aston writes " is a recurrent theme in Gems's theatre" ("Pam Gems" 165), perhaps most evident in both *Piaf* and *Queen Christina* because the historical characters examined therein led such high-profile public lives.

Piaf is a play in two acts that telescopes the career of French singer Edith Piaf. The emphasis is ultimately on Piaf's personal life, and the ways in which her career choices, first as a prostitute, then as an internationally renowned singer, affect her relationships with other people. Throughout the play, there seems to be a revolving door of lovers and friends, though one constant friend, Toine, figures prominently. Gems emphasizes Piaf's isolation by employing multiple casting. In the original production, the twenty-six male characters were played by nine actors, with significant doubling in the characters of Piaf's lovers Marcel and Theo. Both Frank Rich and Walter Kerr express dislike for Gems's employment of multiple casting in their reviews of the American transfer. Rich writes, "various men are often indistinguishable ciphers" (3) as a result of the cross-casting, and Kerr complains that the "literally interchangeable lovers . . . present another puzzle" by never illuminating Piaf's continued involvement with men (3). Yet, the fact that the men become

interchangeable allows Piaf to emerge more clearly because it emphasizes her isolation, as Helene Keyssar writes, "most people . . . were unable to maintain intimacy with Piaf" (131).

None of the female roles is double-cast, however, which makes the women's identities seem less fluid. Keyssar notes that the supporting characters, except Toine, "make brief, sharp cuts in the fabric of Piaf's life, then vanish, leaving the tear and no material substance" (130). Yet in addition to Toine, the character Josephine, based on Marlene Dietrich, appears in more than one scene; because she interacts with Piaf at different stages in the singer's life, there is a sense that her presence was not fleeting, even if the two were often separated by the demands of their careers. Gems says that close friendships between women "are rarely depicted . . . the generosity between Piaf and Dietrich was something I found worthy of the deepest respect" (qtd. in Jahr 4). By having each female character played by a different actress, as opposed to having the significantly higher number of male roles played by the same actors, Gems suggests that the women's influence on Piaf's life is more permanent, more substantial.

The play is episodic in structure, like most of Gems's plays, and musical links serve an important function both structurally and thematically. The style of the scenes reads as generally naturalistic, though there are occasional breaks in the fourth wall. As with *Dusa*, the stage directions at the top of the play state that the "set and staging are non-naturalistic throughout, with scenes indicated by minimal prop and

furnishing changes" (10). The minimalism allows for the scenes to blend together, as the compression of forty years of Piaf's life and career play out, and emphasizes the "interpretative rather than documentary record of [Piaf's] life" (Wandor, "Piaf" 19).

Again, U.S. critics were displeased with the fragmentation and what they perceived to be a lack of substance. For example, Barbara Garson writes that the "resulting series of skits is neither about Piaf's life, nor her art, nor about anything else I can figure out . . . nothing is discernible onstage but bright splotches and meaningless black lines" (72). Walter Kerr laments the lack of answers Gems provides, saying that the "challenge, the tease, the mystery is all in the gaps between" the events that are dramatized (3). I agree that the space between is where the truly provocative material lies, and I think that Gems deliberately leaves room for such gaps through the choices that Kerr dismisses as weak writing. As Elaine Aston notes, the play "stages the gap between the star image of the French cabaret singer . . . and the hardship of her working-class life" ("Pam Gems" 162), and Gems employs Brechtian techniques to expose that gap and explode the myth of Piaf. Aston cites the metatheatrical moment at the play's opening, the leaps in time, and the *gestus* "in which Piaf is struck across the face by different men" (162) as examples of Gems's Brechtian approach.

Elin Diamond suggests that dialogue may be read as *gest*, as a "moment in performance when a play's implied social attitudes become visible to the spectator" (*Unmaking* xiv). Piaf's refrain "I ain't done nothing" throughout the play, with

variations in stress indicated by the playwright—sometimes stressing "*done*," sometimes "*I*"—functions as *gest* by calling attention to Piaf's agency or lack thereof in various contexts. In some cases the line acts as a defense against accusations about her behavior, while in other moments Piaf uses the words to assert both her desire and her right to perform. For example, the line is twice preceded by Piaf's demand, "Get your fucking hands off me" (11); because she says it in response to physical manipulation, violence, or the threat of it, the line emphasizes Piaf's need to gain control over the ways in which she is expected to behave. Conversely, the line at times suggests a demand for agency, as when the manager of the nightclub in the opening scene of the play tries to help Piaf off of the stage because she is "swaying at the microphone" and unable to perform (11). The conflict between wanting to be left alone and wanting to be heard highlights Piaf's struggle for control in her life as both a working-class woman and as a public figure.

Gems creates a striking variation on the line in the final scene of the play, as it is repositioned it in the form of a question to Piaf. Piaf is on her deathbed, and her friend Toine has come to visit her. Toine picks up Edith's *gest* when she asks, "You don't *do* nothing do you?" referring to Piaf's sex life with her much younger husband, Theo, to which Edith admits, "Nah. Still . . . never know" (70). The exchange is comic, but it also draws attention to Piaf's physical frailty, more a result of her lifestyle than advanced age, for she was only forty-eight at the time of her death. Piaf cannot physically "do" much anymore, and the line takes on a new meaning in this

context. In this case Piaf is interested in neither denying responsibility for something she has (or has not) done nor asserting her right to do something which she has not been given the opportunity to do. Rather, she is resigned about her inability to perform, both on stage and in her everyday life, a loss that is embodied by the shifting of the line from Piaf to Toine.

Sarah Rudolph suggests that in *Piaf* Gems "challenges the reader/spectator to . . . evaluate the connection between gender, power, and class in the creation of an image for public consumption" (226). By making the words "I ain't done nothing" part of the first line Piaf speaks in the play, and by choosing "Non, je ne regrette rien" as the final song that plays, allowing it to thus become Piaf's final words, Gems employs a structure that encourages the audience to examine the ways in which Piaf's choices as a woman and a performer were shaped by external forces. The lyrics of the final song suggest Piaf's reconciliation with the choices she made to live her life on her own terms. Yet they also convey Piaf's recognition of the ways in which her choices were not always necessarily her own.

No, I don't regret a thing!

Neither the good that's been done me

Nor the bad. It's all the same to me! . . .

No, I don't regret a thing!

It's all paid for, swept away, forgotten,

I don't give a damn about the past! (Berteaut 424)

The obvious question, as Jane Lapotaire asks is, "Do you really think she had no regrets?' (qtd. in Jahr 4).

Piaf's other refrain, less obvious because the lines are not actually ever the same exact words, is about being on her own. At the beginning of act one, when her manager Papa Leplée asks, "All on your own, are you?" Edith replies, "Yeah" (18); at the top of act two she says to Josephine, "I'm all on me own, you know" (39). Such comments, spanning both acts of the play, indicate Piaf's isolation and her longing for substantial personal relationships. In both cases, the observation of her loneliness leads Piaf to reflect on her dead daughter, though the stories she tells vary drastically in each scene. Rudolph writes that "Piaf's fear of being on her own reflects a growing alienation from self, occurring as others try to construct her, as she strives to construct the image they desire" (233). The changes in Piaf's story over time relate to the shift in her identity from street urchin to star performer; the revisions reveal Piaf's participation in the process of mythologizing herself, as the later version of the story is highly sentimental and infused with a sense of cultural definitions of the "good mother," traits that are lacking in the gruesome version she shares near the beginning of the play.

The first mention of Piaf's child occurs in scene four. Piaf is talking to Papa Leplée, who recounts a dream he had in which his dead mother was beckoning to him, a foreshadowing of his imminent death, as he will be shot and killed by the end of the scene. Piaf notes that her mother abandoned her as a child, "Mine took one

look and pissed off" (18), setting up the theme of abandonment that will run throughout the play, and allowing Piaf to reflect on her own experience as a mother:

> PIAF. I did have a little girl once.
>
> LEPLÉE [*surprised*]. You?
>
> PIAF. Yeah. Cunts.
>
> LEPLÉE. I beg your pardon?
>
> PIAF. The people looking after her. Only never told me! Somebody down the road said, 'Hey d'you know your kid's ill?' I was round there the same week, they wouldn't let me in—'ew new, it's not convenient, anyway, she's dead, died six o'clock this morning.' I wasn't having that. [*Laughs, in fond reminiscence*] Nah, we had a real old punch-up. Hey, did you know something? When people die they go all *stiff*! She was sliding about the parquet in the end . . . talk about shove-ha'penny, we had a right old fracass! [*She laughs, in fond reminiscence. But he stumbles to his feet, almost backing away from her.*] Look, it's not unreasonable. I only wanted a bit of her hair, for me locket. (18)

The details about why Piaf's daughter was living with other people are scant, but they are tangential to the point in some ways. The implication is that Piaf was not considered fit enough to care for her own child, or was not capable of doing so. She does not admit to abandoning the child, but, obviously, her line of work prohibited her from being able to take care of her child by herself. Perhaps because she was

abandoned by her own mother, Piaf seems determined to see herself as a mother who did not abandon her child.

In his review of the play, American critic Walter Kerr expresses a vehement dislike of this scene in particular. He argues that Piaf seems inhuman because "her announcement is almost blithe; she very often speaks of death with a scarecrow-grin . . . there seems to have been a neutral zone where her heart was" (3). Yet Leplée's response indicates that he is repulsed by her attitude and her story, and perhaps the audience will be repulsed as well. Piaf's matter-of-fact approach to the telling of the story, as well as the gory details of the child's dead body "sliding about" in the midst of a free-for-all, do suggest a certain level of emotional detachment on Piaf's part. Yet the incongruity of this very detachment is what makes the audience look more closely at the woman behind the celebrity because Piaf's public persona relied so heavily on her ability to provoke strong emotions through her singing.

The violent demise of Leplée, Piaf's surrogate father figure, at the hand of robbers at the end of the scene solidifies Piaf's isolation. The murder catapults Edith into the spotlight, getting her career going; the private loss leads to public gain. Yet her inability to hold on to people becomes clear. The remainder of the first act is a whirlwind of singing appearances and romantic liaisons with various men. There is a change of pace in the final scene as she engages in a calm and intimate moment with her lover Marcel Cerdan, but his death at the end of the act, like the death of Leplée at the beginning, leaves her on her own again. The first act ends with Piaf alone on

stage, literally in the spotlight, "*to the reverberation of deep notes sustained on the piano and accordion*" (36). The image of the lonely sparrow at the end of the act sets up the downward spiral that is act two. Piaf's fame and fortune increase, but her personal life deteriorates as a result.

In the opening scene of act two, Piaf again conjures up the image of her dead child to emblematize her loneliness. Upset by the cool response of the American audience to her performance, Piaf tells the visiting Josephine that she wants to go home. Her fear of returning to an unappreciative audience is compounded by her feeling that she has no support and leads to her reflection on the past.

> PIAF. I'm all on me own, you know . . . [*tragic*] I wasn't always on me own.
>
> JOSEPHINE [*apart, she knows what's coming*]. Oh shit. [*To Piaf, soothing*] I know, baby, I know.
>
> PIAF. I ever tell you about me little girl?
>
> JOSEPHINE. Sure. Lotsa times. Poor little Georgette.
>
> PIAF [*firmly*]. Natalie.
>
> JOSEPHINE. Didn't you tell me—
>
> PIAF [*a quelling glance*]. Died in my arms. Didn't cry!--well, she was a real little lady, genuine *Marquis*, her father . . .
>
> JOSEPHINE. No kidding. [*Accepts* PIAF*'s fanciful mood.*]
>
> PIAF. Over a year I nursed that kiddie . . . like a little angel, she

was. . . blue eyes . . . fair curly hair . . . like Shirley Temple only . . . you know—pretty. [*Sighs*] I was only a slip of a thing meself . . . barely out of convent.

JOSEPHINE. You're not kidding.

PIAF. Never left her side—well, except to go to the lav, of course . . . Only just made it back when she snuffed it.

JOSEPHINE. My God . . .

PIAF. I mean . . . you'd never forgive yourself.

JOSEPHINE. Right. [*Lifts her glass*] Here's to little Natalie!

PIAF. Who? [*Caught out, she breaks up. They laugh.*] (39)

In this version of the story, Piaf's child is highly idealized, an angel. More importantly, Piaf idealizes herself as a perfect, nurturing mother, totally devoted and selfless.

Piaf's fantasy version of motherhood suggests that her daughter might have been an anchor, but it also reminds the audience that Piaf is free to make such idealizations precisely because she has not had to make concessions in her professional life that she would have had to make if she were caring for a child. Additionally, there is an indication that Josephine has heard it all before, or at least some version of it; thus, the child, in a way, becomes a prop in Piaf's act. The exchange suggests Piaf's power as a performer, as Josephine's response to the story turns from one of indulgence to genuine sympathy; Piaf's commitment to the fantasy

draws Josephine in, and it is not until she gives herself away that the illusion is shattered for both women. Here Gems critiques the cultural construction of legends such as Piaf by dramatizing the ways in which myths are created. Piaf makes herself into what other people want her to be, but she can also make herself into what she wants to be; she is no passive victim, despite the adversity she faces as a result of her class and her gender.

At the end of act one, Piaf and her lover, the boxer Marcel Cerdan, discuss the challenges they face as celebrities whose public professions make taxing demands on them both physically and emotionally. Piaf compares performing as a singer to stepping into the boxing ring, saying, "I don't mean I'm gonna get me head bashed in . . . not unless I'm dead unlucky . . . still . . . it's the same every time . . . that walk to the fucking mike . . . it's from here to Rome . . . And if you fuck it—well, you can't say . . . hang on, loves, mind if I have another go" (35). The threatening nature of putting oneself on display for a living creates a certain vulnerability that conflicts with the power that comes with fame.

Piaf continues to reflect on the paradox, saying that if a show has gone well, "You don't want it to end. Show over . . . you're own your own again" (36). For Piaf, the audience becomes a substitute for family, but it is transient; she relies on the fleeting adoration of strangers rather than a constant source of unconditional support. Marcel and Piaf's conversation about the personal sacrifices that come with a public life extend to the lives of other people. Marcel is married, and though he

apparently loves Piaf, he cannot bring himself to leave his wife and children.

> MARCEL. I'd marry you if I could, Edie.
>
> PIAF. You're the faithful sort, love.
>
> MARCEL. Well, what sort of life is it for her, stuck at home with the kids?
>
> PIAF. Better than any woman in the world. Except me. I've got this, haven't I? (35)

This exchange reveals the constant tension between the private and public worlds in which Piaf exists. She is envious of Marcel's wife, but she does not want to sacrifice her career and the benefits that come from being a celebrity for marriage and motherhood; as Marcel's own experience suggests, the two worlds do not peacefully co-exist. Yet Marcel can have both a family and a high-profile career because the definition of his role as a father does not require the same kind of commitment to the home that the role of mother requires; Piaf's choices are ultimately more limited than Marcel's, despite the common sacrifices they make for their professions.

Piaf's lifelong friend Toine represents the most explicit contrast because, although she and Piaf came from similar backgrounds, Toine has found stability by marrying and having children. Toine chooses a different path from Piaf, and by act two she is no longer a part of Piaf's daily life. When the two meet for the first time in several years, the distance between them is revealed through Piaf's ignorance of the details of Toine's life.

PIAF. How's the kiddie?

TOINE. I got two more now.

PIAF. You got three kids . . . never . . . I don't believe it!

TOINE. You would if you had 'em. (48)

The humor that accompanies Toine's wry observation about the reality of her role as a mother reminds the audience that Piaf's maternal fantasy overlooks the commitment that children require.

The differences that such a commitment brings are clear at the beginning of the scene. Intensely lonely, and in a drug-induced stupor, Piaf asks her assistant to track down Toine, saying, "Fucking friends, never here when you want them" (46). Yet when Toine arrives, Piaf is annoyed rather than pleased to see her because she has already forgotten her request, and she "must have *some* fucking privacy!" (47). Piaf's desire to have people appear and disappear on command as her mood dictates is a luxury afforded by her celebrity and her wealth. Toine, who got of early from work to see Piaf, has no such luxuries, and she is envious of her old friend's freedom.

Yet Toine's fantasies are shown to be as misguided as Piaf's; the glamorous life is not without its own range of compromise. When Toine says she has been following Piaf's life in the papers, Edith cautions her, "You don't want to believe all that. It's not all fun and games" (48). Nevertheless, Piaf plays up the fun part of celebrity life by offering to introduce Toine to Errol Flynn, and again the disparity in

the women's lifestyles is clear. Though clearly excited at the prospect of meeting a Hollywood star, Toine says, "I'll have to go home and change—get a babysitter . . ." (48). Gems again creates a comic moment that to point out the incompatibility of family life and fame; Piaf can act on a whim, but Toine cannot because she has the added responsibility of children at home.

Motherhood functions once again as a symbol for Piaf's isolation at the end of the play. In the final scene, Toine again arrives to console Piaf, who, this time, is dying. For most of the scene, Piaf and Toine reminisce about their past together, and Piaf's final moments are spent reliving her life through (mostly) fond memories; the women are united by their shared experience. When their common ground has run out, however, and Toine is "stumped for a subject" to discuss with Piaf, it is natural for her to talk about her children: "Oh, I know. My little girl, Janine . . . the youngest . . . she's ever such a good dancer, Ede" (72). By returning Toine to her present life as a wife and mother, Gems revisits the isolation that Piaf has experienced as a result of her career. Toine's identity is no longer that of a scrappy prostitute selling herself in order to survive, and though Piaf is no longer a prostitute in the literal sense, she has sold herself, or at least an image of herself, as a performer. As Rudolph suggests, celebrities "become items of exchange between agents and audiences" (250). Part of that exchange, for Piaf, has been the inability to develop a family life.

As Wandor suggests, the play presents an interpretive history of Piaf's life.

Throughout the play, Piaf leans on the past to deal with the present; tracing her own history is a part of her survival mechanism. Gems thus draws attention to the construction of history, particularly in the moments when Piaf's stories of her past change to better suit her persona. By layering history in this way, Gems emphasizes the ways in which identities are constructed by both individuals and the societies in which they exist. Piaf was, in fact, a mother. The varying stories about the loss of her child, and her responses to that loss, play a significant part in her self-construction; she is free from the day-to-day commitments of motherhood, but she is never free from the loss of that role. Although it is less explicit than in many of Gems's other plays, representations of motherhood in *Piaf*, through both memory and living examples, contribute to the characters' understanding of their place in society.

***Queen Christina*: Motherhood and Power**

In *Queen Christina*, which Gems calls a "uterine play" (qtd. in Wandor 190), motherhood takes on a much more prominent role. The heroine of the play, Queen Christina of Sweden, an only child who is raised as a male so that she may assume the throne successfully, has no children. By the time she decides she wants them, after a lifetime of refusing to marry and procreate, it is too late for her to have any. Unlike Piaf, Christina has no illusions about motherhood. Her active resistance against having children is rooted in what she perceives to be the reality of motherhood, based primarily on her own mother's experiences. Though her change

of perspective at the end of the play reflects a certain idealization of motherhood, she does not change her mind about the hardships that the role brings; rather, she comes to believe that the suffering that may accompany motherhood does not signify women's inferiority, as she has long suspected, but that their ability to be resilient in the face of such suffering is in itself a form of strength. It is not that Christina sees a different reality but that she sees reality differently.

The structure of the play is similar to the structure of *Piaf*. The play is an episodic telescoping of approximately forty years of Christina's life, enacted by a cast of thirty characters,[34] played in the original production by a total of 11 actors: four women, six men, and one female child, with the actress playing Queen Christina being the only one limited to a single role. The staging is not naturalistic, though Gems notes at the beginning of act two that "*there is a civilised quality [about the new setting], in contrast to the brutal surroundings in Act One*" (44). Because all of act one takes place in her own kingdom, the differences evoked by the physical change of setting emphasize the sense of Christina's newfound freedom as she ventures beyond her dictated sphere.

The themes raised about women's lack of control over their lives and their bodies in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* resound in *Queen Christina*. Gems makes the historical connection more explicit in this play because it is set in the 17th century; she no longer relies on allusions to the past, but presents the past on stage to draw attention to the problems of the present. Gems writes, "The play is not a

documentary . . . all plays are metaphors, and the dilemma of the real CHRISTINA, reared and educated as a man for the Swedish throne, and then asked to marry and breed for the succession, is perhaps not irrelevant today" (i).

Ruby Cohn suggests that Gems's note about Christina's dilemma "rubs our noses in that relevance to a feminist perspective," but "the play itself does not dramatize what Gems calls her 'dilemma,' since Christina steadfastly refuses marriage for breeding" (*Retreats* 188-189). Yet Christina's refusal is in itself a dramatization of the dilemma. Furthermore, because her refusal is directly linked to her mother's experience, the dilemma emerges across generations, as the audience must consider not only the history of the queen at the center of the play, but also the history of the queen who preceded her.

Christina's dilemma also emerges in her conflicted identity as a woman who was raised as "a man, despising women" (33). In the final scene of the play, she challenges the Catholic cardinal Azzolino, who is attempting to persuade her to fight for the Polish crown. In asserting her reasons for not wanting to fight, Christina laments her own mistreatment of women over the course of her life:

> CHRISTINA. Who are the poorest of all? Women, children . . . the old. Are they fighters, the creators of war? You say you want me for the fight, and, it's true, I was bred a man, despising the weakness of women. I begin to question the favour. To be invited to join the killing, why, where's the advantage? Half the world rapes and destroys

> - must the women, the other half, join in? . . . I begin to see that I have been a traitor to my sex - oh, I believed, when I commanded an army, that I fought for the weak and helpless. We fought for land! And the conscripted men got none of it . . . I don't condemn every man as a murdering brute, far from it, or we'd not have survived this far. But when I think of it . . young men destroyed, infants burned in their cradles . . . women violated . . . how wrong I have been to condemn women for their weakness . . . they have kept us alive! (73-74)

All her life, she has believed the rhetoric about women's inferiority, especially as it relates to their role as mothers.

Though this speech and Christina's subsequent desire to have children are often read as an affirmation of the ideals of cultural or radical feminism, it is important to recognize Christina's acknowledgment of the ways in which class also acts as a determinant in people's oppression. Sally J. Perkins writes that in this scene "Christina easily dismisses her socio-political identity and settles into the radical celebration of woman as life-giver and nurturer. The play's ending thus abandons the materialist perspective . . . as Christina accepts her gender identity as natural, choosing female identification through sisterhood" (211). Yet Christina's insistence on not considering every man a "murdering brute," and her recognition that conscripted men are oppressed in ways that are similar to women's oppression, suggests that she accepts neither stereotype—men as war-mongerers, women as

peace-keepers—as natural but sees them as socially constructed definitions. Her own experience as a "man" was such a construction, and by recognizing her complicity in perpetuating such divisions, she comes to a clearer understanding of the ways in which they work.

Though she does argue that she has been denied her "nature," her belief that nature can be changed belies a strict essentialist reading of the scene.

> CHRISTINA. I have been offered the choice of an active life. In God's name, why must I choose?
>
> AZZOLINO. You could have married.
>
> CHRISTINA. And been denied my mind.
>
> AZZOLINO. But that is nature.
>
> CHRISTINA. Nature is us! We are nature! It is we who change and create change! (76)

Though it is possible to read Christina's "us" in this scene as "women" because of her emphasis on her biological ability to reproduce, her insistence on not only the importance but also the possibility of changing what is considered "natural" implicates Azzolino as well; "us" in this case is humanity, women and men.

The event that ultimately leads to Christina's new awareness is her murder of the traitor Mondalescho. Historically, he was assassinated on Christina's orders, but Gems dramatizes it by having Christina initially order the murder, but then take the dagger to do it herself. Betrayed not only as a political figure but also as a lover,

Christina feels used. She stabs Mondalescho as he clings to her skirts, saying, "I love you. . . I love you . . . I love you" (66). Cohn writes, "from that moment Gems' play begins to lose credibility" (189). Yet the value of the revision of history for dramatic purposes lies in the way that Gems emphasizes the literal act of murder; as queen, Christina was responsible for many deaths, but to kill someone with her own hands has a profound impact on her physically and psychologically.

Christina has a breakdown as a result of her actions, and she goes into a state of severe depression. When she finally begins to emerge from her catatonia, Christina seeks absolution from Azzolino. During their meeting, Christina leaves the room in which she has imprisoned herself to help save the servant Lucia's daughter, Angelica, who is choking. In saving a life, Christina earns repentance. Furthermore, by entering a world that is foreign to her, the kitchen of the estate, she gets a renewed perspective by seeing the working people:

> So warm down there! The smell of ironed clothes . . . linen . . . lace—
>
> Food . . . baking . . .
>
> And babies. The smell of babies. I like the smell of babies—can that be wrong?
>
> AZZOLINO. Of course not.
>
> CHRISTINA. Does it take so many—I was never in a kitchen before.
>
> AZZOLINO. They are proud and happy to be in your service.
>
> CHRISTINA. Why?

AZZOLINO. You are a Queen.

CHRISTINA. A hundred servants, to wait on one woman? Can that be right? Why do we prey on one another—we should all be on the same footing.

AZZOLINO. These thoughts are valuable. (72)

Rudolph suggests that in this scene "Christina comes to an understanding of the attitudes and cycles which perpetuate oppression" (189); Christina's new awareness reflects a growing class-consciousness, not just an identification with other women.

Furthermore, Christina's remark that "What [a woman] is, heaven knows . . . the philosophy is yet to be written, there is a world to be explored" (75) also resists a cultural feminist interpretation of Christina's reversal because it suggests that the definition of woman is not set in stone, nor is it only dependent on biology. When Azzolino says, "We revere the mother" (74), Christina argues that without power there is no respect, and because women are powerless in the existing social structure, such reverence is an empty gesture. This observation leads to her final surge against the forces that have both conferred power on her and taken it away from her. As Christina's hysteria mounts, she attacks Azzolino with a whip, crying out for the children she never had.

The continuing tension of Christina's identification as both a man and a woman is represented by the contradiction between the physical attack on Azzolino and her declaration that she will not fight. Cohn writes that "like modern feminism,

Christina has moved from competing with men to valorizing the feminine. Finally, she is resentful that she never had children . . . as though the choice were not her own" (*Retreats* 189). Yet part of Gems's point is that the notion of choice is fallacious; even with all her "power," Christina does not have a real choice about much, including when and if to have children. Her ability to choose was limited from the moment her father insisted she be raised as a man.

The contradiction that predominates Christina's life begins in the opening scene of the play. The play opens with Christina, a child, "*crouch[ing] in a huge fireplace, lit by the glow from the fire*," as the king and his chancellor pace the floor; there are screams coming from offstage, "*ending in a howl of pain*" (1). The queen's pregnancy has been complicated, and she delivers a stillborn. The chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, exits and then returns to bring the news to the king:

> KING. Dead?
>
> AXEL. As before.
>
> KING. Was it a boy?
>
> AXEL. I believe so.
>
> KING. How is she??
>
> AXEL. Losing blood.
>
> KING. What is it with women? Weak!
>
> *The* QUEEN *begins to sob, and the low sobbing continues throughout the scene.*
>
> AXEL. There's always next year.

> KING. If she breeds again it'll finish her, I'm surprised she's alive this time. (1)

As a result of the Queen's "failure" to produce a male heir, the king demands that legislation be drafted to establish training for the female successor, Christina, in order to make her a man.

Christina, who has heard her mother's suffering and her father's discussion of the situation, including his declaration that women are weak, tells her father that she does not want to be a queen. When she shows her fear of becoming a queen, her father tells her not to worry, "not like your mother . . . like me, like a king. You'll be living with the Chancellor from now on" (3). Thus, the Queen is deprived of her only living child and Christina will be deprived of being a woman; neither woman has a say in the matter, illustrating their lack of power despite their positions as members of the ruling class.

Yet the conferment of power to Christina begins even in this final interaction with her father because he has already decided that his daughter is to become a man, and he relieves her of the weakness associated with being a woman. As he prepares to leave, Christina begs him not to leave her behind. He tells her, "A king must fight. Now remember, look after your mother. Take care of her, she's a woman" (3). Thus, Christina's perceptions of the roles of men and women, as well as her understanding of her own contradictory position, begin to be shaped. The final image of the scene, the young Christina clutching a doll while staring levelly at Axel,

sets up both the lifelong conflict she will have with the chancellor who raises her and the conflict she will have with herself in negotiating her gender identity.

As an adult, Christina's refusal to bear children is directly linked to her belief that her mother was used and mistreated; having children means relinquishing power. Though she reluctantly agrees to marry, in order to please the Swedish nobility, she fights with Axel about her duty to reproduce:

> CHRISTINA. To secure this throne, give or take a miscarriage or so, will take the next twenty years of my life. If it doesn't put me under the ground.
>
> AXEL. The same for all women.
>
> CHRISTINA. All the more reason to stay chaste.
>
> AXEL. . . . if you continue to prate about choice, freedom, and all the other fashionable rubbish you'll have the church at your throat and I shan't answer for your future, your throne or your personal safety . . .
>
> CHRISTINA. Why didn't you leave me in the parlour with the rest of the women, it's what you want!
>
> AXEL. Not at all. Your unique position demands both the manly qualities of a king, and the fecundity of a woman.
>
> CHRISTINA. Well you can't *have* both.
>
> AXEL. Why not? For twenty years I've prepared you for it.
>
> CHRISTINA. And how? By making a man of me. A man, despising

women—just like you. You've had your joke, you and nature between you. (33)

Christina's position on motherhood suggests, on the one hand, sympathy for women because she recognizes the range of sacrifices, physical and emotional, that comes with the process. Childbearing consumes time, body, and mind; it is a threat both literally and figuratively. At the same time, however, her attitude about women who sit passively in the parlor indicates her distance from them; she is both a victim and a perpetrator of the prescribed order that keeps women in subordinate positions.

This tension between identifying with and rejecting women continues to emerge in the following scene. Christina's former lover, Ebba, who has recently married Duke Magnus de la Guardie, much to Christina's dismay, enters. It is their first meeting since Ebba's marriage, and there is a gulf between them, which Ebba attempts to bridge by telling the queen about the women she met in France, the bluestockings, who "read, write, publish . . . even [refuse] to marry! . . . They revere you, Pixie" (36). The flattery succeeds, and Christina draws Ebba to her in an embrace, but "*lets go at once,* " saying, "Get out. I will not have pregnant cows under my roof . . . Ugh, how could you?"

EBBA. Pixie, it is natural.

CHRISTINA. So's plague . . . Can you feel it, does it move?

EBBA. Oh yes . . . it lives. (36-37)

The exchange reveals that Christina is curious despite her revulsion.

Though Katharine Worth challenges the dramatic effectiveness of Christina's recognition scene at the end of the play, saying, "The suddenness of Christina's desire for a child may not be altogether convincing in dramatic terms, coming so late and so unprepared. Perhaps it is too clear at such a moment that Gems is shaping the Christina image to allow a modern dilemma to emerge" (10), Christina's conflicted response to Ebba's pregnancy indicates that her desire for a child is not entirely out of the blue. Additionally, when she tells Axel that he has lived "a full life! Soldier, courtier, lover . . . you even allowed your own daughters to marry where their desires led them . . . [but] you denied me all of it" (34), Christina touches on the fact that Axel has been able to reconcile his public and private lives in a way that she has not bee able to. Such observations contribute to Christina's reversal, even though she continues to actively resist marriage and motherhood for most of the play.

Later in the scene with Ebba, Christina remarks, "Oh, what do you want me to say—that you look wonderful, that your skin glows like a pearl" (37), suggesting that Christina finds Ebba's beauty enhanced by her condition. Furthermore, her inquiry, "are you in milk?" adds a sexual dimension to the attraction by harkening back to the first scene in which Ebba and Christina's physical intimacy is revealed. Earlier in the play, after fighting with her mother, Christina lunges for Ebba's breasts "*like an importunate baby. EBBA lets her nurse briefly*" (9). Rudolph suggests that this interaction "suggests Christina's need to be nurtured and Ebba's role in replacing the

absent bond between mother and daughter" (178). Thus Ebba's pregnancy alienates Christina on two levels. First, she is put off as a lover because Ebba's role as a wife in a heterosexual marriage now has a specific physical manifestation. Secondly, Christina's remark, "what are you worried about, you've got what's in your belly" (37), suggests that she can no longer rely on Ebba to nurture her because Ebba will devote herself to her own child.

After Ebba leaves, Christina again reveals her fear of reproduction. She speaks to Ebba in apostrophe, imagining the "brood of beauties" that she will produce, but the fantasy dissolves with her observation that Ebba "could be dead by Michaelmas" (38). Motherhood represents a significant threat to women in Christina's eyes, primarily because of her mother's series of miscarriages and stillbirths and the lasting physical ailments that her mother suffers as a result of her fifteen years of pregnancy and labor.

The physical toll that childbearing takes on women is not Christina's only aversion to motherhood. Her mother's behavior, which is often appalling, contributes to Christina's dismissal of women; she does not want to become that kind of woman. Throughout the play, Christina treats her own mother cruelly. Because Christina and others show the Queen Mother such little respect, it would be easy for the audience to dismiss her as easily as the characters do. Her first entrance shows her fighting with the guards as she attempts to get by them to see her daughter. Gems's description of her in the stage directions says,

> *She is fine-boned, dressed in messy finery. She presents a picture of an intensely unhappy woman, near anguish. She is often coarse, trivial, out of place, even comic. But the intensity of unhappiness, and her bewilderment, prevent us from finding her just a figure of fun. A beautiful woman who has now lost her looks.* (7)

Thus, on paper, Gems sets up the Queen Mother as a character who embodies a certain stereotype but also insists on her sympathetic quality. The challenge lies in translating such a direction into performance.

The Queen Mother's first appearance reveals the contentious nature of her relationship with Christina. She has come to inquire about the outcome of Christina's meeting with the suitor, a German prince, who visited in the previous scene. When Christina reveals that she has turned the suitor away, the Queen Mother's disappointment emerges as an attack on Christina's physical unattractiveness.

> MOTHER. Took one look, couldn't run fast enough, well don't blame me. (*to* EBBA) What did he say . . . oh I should know better than to ask her. I saw you in the stables this morning, the pair of you. At least I could get a man.
>
> CHRISTINA. What do you want?
>
> MOTHER. Nothing you can give me. Oh, what does she look like? All those babies, and she had to be the one to live!
>
> CHRISTINA. (*scuffles across, jerking her crippled shoulder at her mother*) Did

your best to do me in, crippled me for life.

MOTHER. Stop it! . . . the nurse dropped you! Anyway, what difference does it make, you're so ugly—

CHRISTINA. As you never tire of telling me.

MOTHER. It's true! (*Weeps*) I'm not staying in this hellhole another winter, I shall go to Italy.

CHRISTINA. Clear off, the sooner the better.

MOTHER. What? But we shan't see you then!

CHRISTINA. Good.

MOTHER. But we're your mother! . . . I've a right to grandchildren, the same as any other woman. (8-9)

The Queen Mother's harsh treatment of Christina seems to justify Christina's dismissive attitude; who wants to be constantly reminded that she is a disappointment?

Yet though her exit is comic, as she rages on about her own problems as Ebba escorts her from the room, there is an indication that the Queen Mother's behavior is connected to her role in society. She tells the beautiful Ebba, "Wait till you're my age, ignored, no pension, treated without respect—wait till you've got wrinkles on your face, see how much notice they take of you then!" (9). Like Maud in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, Christina's mother represents the woman who did her duty but ends up with little to show for it and the contempt of her daughter as

well. Her expressed desire to be near her daughter suggests that even though Christina fails to meet her mother's expectations, her mother genuinely wants to have a relationship with her. As Ebba tells Christina, "She wants your love" (9). Thus, the Queen mother's estrangement from Christina solidifies her loneliness; she has no suitors, no friends. She has no status, except as a mother and a widow, and she cannot develop the new persona of grandmother without her daughter's compliance. Because her daughter refuses to follow in her footsteps, she feels cheated.

Ideally, Christina's changing attitude toward her mother by the end of the play allows the audience to see their own complicity in allowing such stereotypes to perpetuate. It is difficult, though, to find sympathy for the Queen Mother at times. In act one, scene three, when Descartes visits Sweden, Mother is at her outrageous worst. She eats greedily from an ornate box of chocolates, mangles French as she flirts with Descartes, and shows the visiting philosopher a box that contains her dead husband's heart and "member" in it, saying, "We never go anywhere without it" (13-14). She cannot stop her "running commentary" as Christina and members of her court perform a masque for Descartes (15). Her public persona is grating.

In scene four, however, Gems establishes the Queen Mother as a more complex character than she has seemed to be until this point. Christina is ill and her mother keeps a bedside vigil, guarding her against unwanted visitors. The scene suggests that she has more power in the domestic sphere, away from visitors and the

public. The private setting allows for an exchange between her and Axel, in which her anti-war position emerges, later to be picked up by Christina.

> MOTHER. What have you ever done for the women of this country?
>
> AXEL. I have the satisfaction of seeing this nation immeasurably stronger than when I took up the reins of office thirty years ago.
>
> MOTHER. We've been at *WAR* thirty years!
>
> AXEL. The voice of Sweden speaks to the world—
>
> MOTHER. Never mind the voice, what about the eggs, where are the eggs?
>
> AXEL. You have never understood the nature of war economy.
>
> MOTHER. And when should I have learned that—I was pregnant for fifteen years.
>
> AXEL. Precisely.
>
> MOTHER. The women of this country don't need to understand theory. They're too busy keeping their families alive against the day you expose them to the sword. (22-23)

By allowing the Queen Mother to have an open exchange about politics with the chancellor, even if (or especially because) Axel is dismissive of her views, Gems subverts the stereotypical image that Mother has previously embodied. The difference between mother and daughter becomes clear: Christina, because she is acting with the authority of a man, has the freedom to express such views in public,

whereas her mother must not presume to meddle in political decisions because she is merely the widow of a king and the mother of a queen.

As the scene progresses, Christina tells Axel that she will not engage in further wars. To mollify him, she agrees to let him publicly announce her intent to marry her cousin Karl. As Axel departs, "CHRISTINA *and her* MOTHER *make vile faces at his back, united for once*" (25). Mother is delighted at the prospect of Christina's wedding, but their friendly exchange is short-lived as Christina reveals that she has a pretty young woman in her bed. Mother does not approve of Christina's behavior, and she cannot remain united with her.

The Queen Mother is particularly devastated when Christina ultimately abdicates, giving the throne to her cousin Karl instead of going through with the proposed marriage. Christina's decision is met with resistance from everyone, including Karl, but her mother's resistance quickly moves to hysteria. In abdicating, Christina affects not only her own identity, but also the identity of her mother. Furthermore, Christina's rejection of her duty in order to free herself from the constraints of it makes the sacrifices her mother made to fulfill her duty seem wasted. The Queen Mother devoted much of her life to fulfilling her obligation to provide an heir to the throne, at great cost to herself. She also sacrificed her active participation in Christina's upbringing so that her daughter could become the ruler of Sweden, never enjoying her role as a mother, but always feeling the effects of that role. What little power she has resides in her relationship to her daughter, and in

relinquishing her role as queen, Christina takes even that away.

Yet Christina makes a rare gesture of kindness to her mother in this scene, the last time the audience sees the two women interact. Mother is almost collapsing, and Christina attempts to console her, pinning the large sapphire and diamond brooch that she wears onto her mother's breast. Mother is overcome, "But it's your best one! Look . . . look, she's given me her best one!" (43). By allowing the two women to share a brief moment of fondness at the end of act one, Gems provides room for the audience to recognize that the bond between them, though strained, is important. Christina's gesture, giving away her jewels, symbolizes the freedom she gains from rejecting the throne, but it also symbolizes a love for her mother that she has often found difficult to express.

The freedom that comes from abdication means that Christina can now leave the demands about her lifestyle behind. After everyone leaves, Christina stands alone on stage, and

> *in a whirl of movement, she rips off her dress to reveal riding clothes underneath, and boots. She throws the dress across the space onto the throne, whirls round, her arms out in ecstasy, and leaves at the run.* (43)

This moment symbolizes the freedom Christina finds in rejecting womanhood. The clothing of the Queen becomes very clearly a costume, one which Christina uses to disguise her true identity, symbolized by the riding clothes. The sudden flurry of activity, and her "ecstasy" suggest that she has more power by not being queen

because she can finally be herself.

The second act follows Christina through various meetings with men and women in various countries, as she lives her newly liberated life and seeks to define herself beyond the confines of her inherited role. In these meetings, the question of motherhood becomes the subject of debate, and Christina begins to more closely examine her own reasons for refusing to have children. Christina ultimately reaches the conclusion that women should not have to sacrifice motherhood in order to have a public life; society needs to find ways to make it possible for women to balance public and private lives. As in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*, in *Queen Christina* Gems suggests that the quest for equality should not center on women becoming more like men. She condemns social structures that denigrate women and motherhood, but she also criticizes feminist ideologies that demonize motherhood in a different way.

Act two begins with Christina's visit to France to meet with the bluestockings, the liberated women that Ebba told her about earlier in the play. From the beginning, Christina's rejection of marriage and motherhood is a central concern.

> CHRISTINA. I've read your thoughts on the condition of women!
>
> CATHERINE. Madame, your name rings through Europe.
>
> MARQUISE. The Queen of Sweden declines to marry . . .
>
> CATHERINE. To refuse to procreate, even at the cost of a throne!
>
> CHRISTINA. Oh, I wasn't kicked out, if that's what they're saying—no, no—decision was mine!

CATHERINE. You have asserted the freedom of all women! (45-46)

In this case, Christina's choice makes her a symbol of women's liberation that the bluestockings latch onto. They are interested in converting her to their cause because her powerful position makes her "an important ally" (50). By revealing the women's desire to make use of Christina, Gems suggests that despite Christina's belief that her choices make her free, her identity is still subject to the perceptions of others.

The bluestockings represent radical feminists, and Christina is not in total agreement with their philosophies. When Catherine tells Christina that she is an inspiration, one who has shown them the way, Christina reveals a fundamental ideological difference, saying that she feels like an impostor because she does not hate all men, as these women deem necessary for their cause. Christina claims, "But I only pushed off because I couldn't stand it. I wanted to live!" (49); it is not men that she rejects, but the socially imposed constraints that her role as a queen demanded of her. She has lived an active life because she was encouraged to behave like a man, but now that her kingdom demands an heir, she cannot bring herself to make the sacrifices she believes come with the role of mother. She seeks balance, not more divisiveness.

Christina is surprised by the vehemence with which the women reject relationships with men. Catherine, separated from her husband, has sent her two sons off to boarding school, although they are only two and four years old;

Christina's observation that they seem a bit young to be separated from their mother suggests a concern for the raising of children, even if she does not want children of her own. The Marquise is a widow, "happily, freed from that subjection" of marriage (47), who says she despised being nothing more than a breeding ground. Though Christina agrees that the role of breeder is oppressive, she finds it strange that the Marquise derived no pleasure from her sexual relationship with her husband.

> CATHERINE. To submit to men is treachery to our cause. The enemy must be attacked, does your Majesty not agree?
>
> CHRISTINA. To be honest, the word enemy chills my liver after thirty years at war. I see your point . . . the need to be extreme. You ain't afraid of being laughed at?
>
> CATHERINE. On the contrary, we are well aware that we are considered highly ridiculous . . . not the least by other women, who call us traitors to our sex.
>
> MARQUISE. And who will be first to exploit the benefits we achieve on their behalf . . .
>
> CHRISTINA. I'm sure you're right, though to tell the truth I've never much enjoyed the company of women, you can't get any sense out of them. (47-48)

Despite her efforts and her interest in these women and their philosophies, Christina cannot let go of her prejudices against women or her affection for, and identification

with, men.

Christina's physical appearance and her behavior also mark her as different from the Marquise and Catherine. She wears "battered" riding clothes, "*over which she has draped a skirt in honour of the visit*" (45). Her voracious appetite, as she "*cram[s] her face with cakes*" (45), and her indecorous lifting of the women's skirts, which she jokes is to check for their blue stockings, makes her seem coarse in comparison. All of these element combine to highlight the maleness of her upbringing. After she leaves the women belittle Christina's naiveté and her appearance:

> CATHERINE. She's naive. And a moralist.
>
> MARQUISE. Yes. All this fervour for the Pope.
>
> CATHERINE. The nobility of Rome will soon tire of an ex-Queen at table, then where will she be? We recruit them all as their breasts fall.
>
> MARQUISE. How harsh you are. The Queen of Sweden is an important ally.
>
> CATHERINE. Then we'll pursue her.
>
> MARQUISE. Pity she's so little to look at.
>
> CATHERINE. Yes. Whatever was she wearing? (50)

Rudolph suggests that the bluestockings, because of their radical separatism and their preoccupation with appearances, are "simply different versions of the same ills which plague the dominant order" (190). Ultimately, the meeting reveals that Christina cannot fit in either world, male or female, despite her efforts to shape her own

identity.

Christina proceeds to Rome, where she meets with the Pope, who is also interested in her conversion. Again, the meeting centers on reproduction and Christina's refusal to have children, though this time, the opposing view is presented. For the Pope, Christina's refusal to procreate is a rejection of her "sacred destiny" (53). Christina challenges his position by using her mother as an example:

> Take my mother. Eighteen pregnancies, stillbirths, premature drop . . . dead infants in the churchyard, unnamed corpses, flesh of her flesh, torn, cut out . . . you should see that woman's quarters, she can neither sit nor stand without pain. And don't tell me she's blessed to suffer in the name of the Lord, the woman's banal. She's banal because of it. (53)

Christina goes on to argue that the Catholic church sanctions the exploitation of women through its stance on the subject of procreation, and suggests that what the Pope deems "natural" is in fact a social construction, noting that in order to make progress, "We must look to ourselves" (54).

The juxtaposition of the two meetings illustrates the difficulty Christina has in reconciling her identity as both a woman and a man. The bluestockings alienate her with their fervent separatism, and the church alienates her with its insistence on men and women observing their supposedly natural roles. In both cases, Christina's connection to her parents, even though they are absent, informs her position. Near

the end of the scene with the bluestockings, Christina is visibly disturbed by the Marquise's refusal to visit her dying father because it would "impede" the women's cause. Christina's own father died when she was only six years old, as a result of the Thirty Years War, and though her only interaction with him in Gems's play is brief, it suggests that Christina had a deep affection for him. Her longing for freedom does not include denying that affection. Her meeting with the Pope reinforces her conviction that the prohibition of birth control creates a burden reserved for women stems directly from her mother's life as a breeder for the throne. Christina shows more sympathy for her mother in her discussion of her than in of her treatment of her, but the scene reveals her growing awareness between her mother's demeanor and her dictated role.

Christina's sympathy for her mother continues to emerge in scene five. When Azzolino offers his condolences for her "loss," Christina is at first dismissive, pretending not to know what he is talking about.

> AZZOLINO. Her Majesty, your mother.
>
> CHRISTINA. Oh who cares, she's not important. A foolish woman.
>
> AZZOLINO. Perhaps the simple suffer less.
>
> CHRISTINA. Not her . . . always in pain or a rage—miserable life.
>
> AZZOLINO. She bred you.
>
> CHRISTINA. I bolted!
>
> AZZOLINO. We all fail our parents.

CHRISTINA. Not at all, you're a cardinal.

AZZOLINO. But I am not the Pope. (64)

Though Rudolph suggests that in this exchange Christina "claims responsibility for her own origins" (183), it is possible to read Christina's "I bolted" as an expression of guilt about abandoning her mother. Azzolino's comment about failing one's parents indicates that Christina's attitude is not cavalier but rueful. Christina was taken away from her mother at a young age by edict, not choice; her mother was ultimately deprived of mothering the only child she had, and Christina was given no opportunity to bond with her mother. As an adult, Christina left her mother behind to make her own way; she chose a different path by refusing to have children and denied her mother the grandchildren that she so desperately wanted.

Thus, by the end of the play, when Christina changes her position, forcefully identifying herself as a woman and expressing her longing for children, her desire stems from her recognition of the ways in which the prevailing social order has limited her range of choices. Even if Christina does come to accept her gender role as natural, which is debatable, Gems explodes the notion of a universal sisterhood once Christina exits. Though in the final scene Christina is dressed in a "pink overgarment, festively decorated" (69), her femininity reads as a self-conscious, awkward performance. First of all, she toys with a whip that sits on a table in the room; it is the whip she later uses to attack Azzolino. Immediately before her exit, however, is the most incongruous moment of business, as she "blows her nose

loudly on her skirt" (79). A fancy dress cannot change who she is, even if she wants it to.

The final moment of the play re-emphasizes Christina's inability to fit in either world. After Christina's departure, Lucia and Azzolino discuss everyone's indebtedness to the queen, saying,

> AZZOLINO. A great, brave woman. Fine intellect.
>
> LUCIA. Learned.
>
> AZZOLINO. And caring.
>
> LUCIA. Indeed. We are all in her debt.
>
> AZZOLINO. I echo that.
>
> LUCIA. (*sighs*) Nothing to look at, of course. (*She pats her hair.*) (79)

By returning to the theme of Christina's physical unattractiveness, Lucia's comment highlights what Aston describes as Gems's use of "the cross-dressed body towards a more subversive end: not a harmonious, androgynous vision of two sexes in one, but a 'misfit' body which invites us to question gender roles, identity, and behaviour" (160). The *gestic* refrain about Christina's looks, as well as Lucia's attention to her own beauty, patting her hair, disrupts Christina's tentatively triumphant exit from the play after regaining her confidence; her victory is undercut by Lucia's comment, reminding the audience that Christina will never truly fit in either world.

In *Queen Christina*, Gems continues to work with history to emphasize the need for change in her own time and place. By focusing on the individual's struggle

to define herself within, and against, her culture, Gems questions the power structures that create stratification based on issues of class, race, religion, and gender; in this way, the play resounds strikingly with England in 1977, a time in which such divisiveness was increasing. In her afterword to the play, Gems writes, "We can change things. Who else? We can decide what the bottom line should be, what the demands should be" (48). Her interpretation of the history of Queen Christina of Sweden suggests that the path to change means both acknowledging differences and finding common ground.

Cloud Nine: Motherhood and The Emerging Individual

After the production of two plays in 1976, Churchill contributed a piece to the collaboratively written *Floorshow*, Monstrous Regiment's first cabaret production, in 1977. Also in 1977, her play *Traps* was produced at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. She then had two television pieces produced—*The After Dinner Joke* (written 1977, televised 1978) and *The Legion Hall Bombing* (written and televised in 1978). *Cloud Nine*, first performed at the Dartington College of Arts in February 1979 by the Joint Stock Theatre Group, marks the return of Churchill's history plays to the stage. The London run of the play began at the Royal Court Theatre in March 1979; a revival subsequently opened at the Royal Court Theatre in September 1980, with a different cast. The American premiere of the play in 1981, with slight revisions, was directed by Tommy Tune. Major revivals of the play have been mounted in 1986 and 2001.

Like *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Cloud Nine* was developed in workshops with Churchill, director Max Stafford-Clark, the company of actors who would perform the play, and additional participants, including historian Sheila Rowbotham, an "older woman" who ran the canteen at the rehearsal space, and the mother of one of the company members (Thurman 57). The workshops centered primarily on issues related to what Churchill labels "sexual politics" (qtd. in Simon, "Sex" 126), and the actors in the original cast were "chosen on the basis of sexual experience and preference, as well as . . . their professional experience" (Thurman 54). As a result, the material generated by the workshop participants creates an interesting convergence of identities between the actors, the other workshop attendees, and the characters that can never be fully reproduced in subsequent productions. For example, the original American cast expressed confusion and apprehension when rehearsals began in 1981, and Nicolas Surovy (Harry Bagley/Martin) said, "Many actors I know read for the play, but just couldn't handle its sexual aspects" (qtd. in Dunning C4), whereas Jim Hooper (Betty/Edward) from the 1979 Joint Stock cast said, "[I have] never felt so close to a play. It is like a second skin" (qtd. in Wandor, "Free" 16).

Mothers and motherhood featured in the workshops for *Cloud Nine* in both theoretical and practical terms. When discussing the process of identity construction, "everyone in the company talked about 'childhoods and parents, and about the way we got to be who we are'" (Churchill, qtd. in Thurman 54). In a more

tangible intervention of motherhood into the development process, the mother of original cast member Julie Covington participated in the workshops, and, according to Churchill, many of her comments were incorporated into the character of 20th century Betty (Thurman 57). Thus, Covington, in playing act two Betty, was, in some respects, embodying her own mother, who, according to Churchill, "disapproved of us all very much" (qtd. in Thurman 57). Considering the intricate weaving of the characters' enactment of and responses to maternal approbation and censure throughout the play, it is interesting to note that the American actors who played the roles of Betty in the Tommy Tune-directed version, E. Katherine Kerr (Ellen/Mrs. Saunders/Betty) and Zeljko Ivanek (Betty/Gerry), remarked jointly at the time, "'I bet there's something in every role—' '—that you don't want your mother to see you doing!'" (qtd. in Dunning C4).

As conservatism gained strength politically and socially throughout the end of the 1970s, Churchill's plays reflect a mounting resistance to conservatism in terms of both the content of her plays and the increasingly experimental dramatic structures she employed. For example, Churchill's approach to history in *Cloud Nine* differs from the two earlier history plays in that the action of the play is divided between two distinct time periods: Africa in 1880 and London in 1980.[35] Though *Vinegar Tom* has intrusions from the present in the form of songs, the primary action of the play remains rooted in the 17th century; *Cloud Nine* creates a different historical juxtaposition, using an historical setting for act one, and a contemporary setting for

act two. The two periods remain distinct from one another until the very end of the play, when several characters from the 19th century join the 20th century Betty on stage, culminating in Betty embracing her 19th century self, the final image of the play. Yet even when the two worlds do merge, they do so in a more self-contained fashion than they do in *Vinegar Tom;* the temporal disruptions in *Cloud Nine* are not framed as self-referential commentary but exist within the world of the play itself.

Churchill says that she originally intended to set *Cloud Nine* entirely in the present, but the idea to investigate colonialism emerged after the workshops, in which the topic had been touched up on briefly. Amelia Howe Kritzer writes,

> *Cloud Nine* shows Churchill in a different relationship to historical material than in the history plays. The farcical misery and sometimes bizarre fictions of the first act make for a deliberately artificial construction of the past . . . the entire first act serves as a reference point within the second, rather than an episode preceding it. (*Empowerment* 128-129)

Yet in its use of cross-casting, the lapse of only twenty-five years, and the appearance of ghosts from both the present and the past, the present day of act two is shown to be an equally artificial construction. The structure insists on the inseparable relationship between the two, particularly when the 19th century characters reemerge bodily in the 20th century, and the present is also constructed as an historical moment as a result.

The characters' struggle with their lifestyles in the second act suggests the continuation of social constriction across centuries. Though Michelene Wandor argues that act one of *Cloud Nine* is socialist-feminist but act two is bourgeois-feminist because it "merely 'shows' us men and women living as they wish, based on individual choice" ("Women Playwrights" 65), claiming that the 20th century characters act on what they desire rather than what they are forced to choose, the trading of hidden desires for open ones brings freedom only on one level, and it is this contradiction that emphasizes the historical persistence of oppressive structures. As Amelia Howe Kritzer suggests, "while sexual patterns show themselves somewhat resistant to change, patterns of societal power are yet more resistant, proving the adaptability of the prevailing power structure in the process of maintaining itself" (*Empowerment* 125). For example, Edward fears losing his job if his homosexuality is exposed, and Lin risks losing custody of her child as a result of her open identification as a lesbian. They may live more open lifestyles than their Victorian predecessors, but their acknowledgment of those desires still presents significant obstacles and governs their choices. Harry Bagley and Ellen enjoy certain freedoms in the 19th century of act one specifically because they hide their true identities. In either case, the characters must negotiate their desires within the confines of their societies' laws and mores.

In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill undermines stereotypes by employing them in a way that exposes them as social constructions. She plays with a variety of stereotypes,

including various mother types: Maud as domineering mother/mother-in-law, 20th century Victoria as distant mother, Lin as slightly violent working-class mother, 19th century Betty as disaffected mother, and 20th century Betty as, at first, a replication of Maud's domineering mother/mother-in-law. Edward also adopts motherly roles in both acts, though he does not embody any particular stereotype about motherhood. There are no idealized mothers in the play, but in becoming a "real" person by the end of the play, Betty also becomes a "real" mother rather than a mother type, who recognizes that her lives and her children's, though forever entwined, are actually separate existences.

Edward is inclined to be a nurturer in both acts, and his "maternal instinct" seems stronger than his sister's, raising questions about the relationship between gender and mothering. In act one, Edward's interest in mothering is seen as unacceptable behavior by the adults in his society, from his parents to the family's servant, Joshua. The first time Edward is caught playing with the doll in the play, he explains to Clive and Betty that he is "minding" Vicky's doll for her, rather than "playing" with her, since he has been reprimanded for playing with the doll in the past. In this scene, both Betty and the children's nanny, Ellen, defend Edward, assuring Clive that Edward is not playing with the doll. Edward relents, and his relieved father notes that Edward is being "manly" by taking care of his younger sister (257).[36]

The next time he is caught with the doll, however, Edward protests giving her

up, saying, "She's not Victoria's doll, she's my doll. She doesn't love Victoria and Victoria doesn't love her. Victoria never even plays with her" (275). His mother reacts more violently in this scene, slapping him as she forcibly removes the doll from his grasp (275). In this instance, neither Clive nor Ellen is on stage, though Betty's mother, Maud, is present and offering her critique of not only Edward's but also Betty's behavior, suggesting that Betty is failing in her duties as a mother primarily because she has allowed the governess to leave Edward unattended. Betty's markedly different handling of her son in this context reflects her own conflicts in both the desire and ability to perform her role according to cultural standards. When Clive is present, Betty does not act as disciplinarian, but as moderator between father and child. When her mother is observing her, however, Betty becomes more aggressive in exerting control over her child, perhaps a reflection of her own mother's methods. For once the doll has been retrieved from Edward, Maud reprimands the doll, saying, "Where did Vicky's naughty baby go? Shall we smack her? Just a little smack? There, now she's a good baby" (275).

Of course, Victoria is a very young baby, and is herself represented by a doll, but her disinterest in playing with dolls/babies emerges in contrast to Edward's maternal instincts in discussions that illustrate the ways in which gender roles are culturally prescribed; the discussions are themselves enactments of such constructions. For example, after Edward's declaration that Vicky never plays with her doll, Maud remarks, "Victoria will learn to play with her" (275), suggesting that

Victoria will have little choice in the matter, much like Edward cannot choose to play with dolls because it disrupts the accepted order, raising questions about choice as it relates to mothering as a practice. As Chodorow suggests, "Being a mother . . . is not only bearing a child—it is being a person who socializes and nurtures" (11).

Yet in act two it seems that Victoria has not developed an interest in playing the role of mother, even though she now has a child of her own. Her son never appears on stage, and the lack of Tommy's physical presence on stage indicates a disconnect between mother and child. For example, in scene two, Tommy goes off on his own, and no one knows where he is:

> LIN. Where's Tommy?
>
> VIC. What? Didn't he go with Martin?
>
> LIN. Did he?
>
> VIC. God oh God.
>
> LIN. Cathy! Cathy!
>
> VIC. I haven't thought about him. How could I not think about him? Tommy. (304)

Lin's daughter Cathy eventually finds Tommy hiding in the bushes and solves the problem. Earlier in the scene, Victoria and her husband Martin discuss her job opportunity in Manchester; Martin tells her to "follow it through . . . leave me and Tommy alone for a bit, we can manage perfectly well without you" (301). In trying to find her own identity, Victoria needs to distance herself from her husband and her

son. She's as distant from her child as Betty was from hers, but for different reasons.

Victoria's distance from a traditional maternal role is further heightened by Edward's assumption of the duties of homemaker after he moves in to live with Lin and Victoria and their respective children. Edward is the person who gives Martin instructions for the evening when Martin is taking the two children to spend the night at his house, making the children seem to be his primary responsibility. When Edward tells his former lover, Gerry, about the new living arrangements he notes, "I'm on the dole. I am working, though. I do housework . . . They [Lin and Vic] go out to work and I look after the kids" (315). Thus, in act two, Edward's desire to nurture is liberating for both him and Victoria, as both are freed from their socially defined roles through their adoption of a reimagined notion of family.

Churchill also explores the possibility of alternatives to the traditional family unit through Lin, the lesbian single mother. Lin comes from a working-class background, and she serves as a contrast to the theoretically informed Victoria, particularly in her relationship with her daughter, Cathy. Whereas Victoria is markedly separate from her child, Lin is often besieged by Cathy. She tells Victoria,

> [Cathy's] frightened I'm going to leave her. It's the baby minder didn't work out when she was two, she still remembers. You can't get them used to other people if you're by yourself. It's no good blaming me. She clings round my knees every morning up the nursery and they don't say anything but they make you feel you're making her do it. But

> I'm desperate for her to go to school. I did cry when I left her the first day. You wouldn't you're too fucking sensible. (290)

As a single parent, Lin has little room to get away from her child because she bears the sole responsibility for her, a point that is reinforced by Cathy's rather boisterous stage presence. In her review of an American production of *Cloud Nine* in 1983 Wendy Lesser claims that "children who spout obscenities, scream at the slightest opposition, and refuse to go to bed on time are touted as delightful companions in this play. Apparently the well-behaved child is another aspect of British oppression which feminism has succeeded in rooting out" (27). Yet both Edward's (act one) and Cathy's (act two) behavior raises questions about control and identity, as do their mothers' various responses to their outbursts, which range from attempts at reasoning with the children to ending debates with a slap. Cathy is rarely "delightful," even if she is a comic character. Her presence makes Lin's job seem that much more challenging, particularly as the audience watches Lin struggle to find a balance between allowing Cathy to make choices for herself and needing to supervise, and sometimes deny, those choices.

Lin's confusion over the "right" way to raise her child touches on the idea that shaping a child's identity, particularly as it relates to traditional gender roles, is a mother's responsibility. Lin tells Victoria, "I give Cathy guns, my mum didn't give me guns. I dress her in jeans, she wants to wear dresses. I don't know. I can't work it out, I don't want to" (303). Similarly, 20th century Betty reflects on her perceived

successes and failures as a mother based on how her children have "turned out." For example, when she meets Gerry at the end of the play and acknowledges openly for the first time that her son is gay, Betty says, "Well people always say it's the mother's fault but I don't intend to start blaming myself. He seems perfectly happy" (320). Because both Edward's and Cathy's behavior indicates that children will ultimately find a way to become themselves, and that the children's search for their identity is affected by forces beyond their relationships with their mothers, the play presents the hopeful suggestion that women might be able to break free from the impossible, culturally invented, notion that mothers "have unlimited power in the shaping of [their] offspring" (Thurer 300).

The burden of single parenthood is compounded by Lin's open identification as a lesbian. She and her child face significant challenges because of it, both socially and legally:

> LIN. I left [my husband] two years ago. He let me keep Cathy and I'm grateful for that.
>
> VIC. You shouldn't be grateful.
>
> LIN. I'm a lesbian.
>
> VIC. You still shouldn't be grateful. (291)

The fact is, however, that lesbian mothers in England in the 1970s faced a very real danger of having their children taken away from them. In 1976, *Spare Rib* reported that

> When a woman who is a lesbian is unlucky enough to have to go to court to fight for custody she has at the moment no chance of winning. The judge always awards custody to the father. The most she can hope for is "access"—the right to visit the children who have lived with her from birth . . . One judge . . . went to some lengths to explain that while he did not blame the mother for her lesbianism . . . it was vital that the court distinguish between understanding and approval. To approve of homosexuality, he said, would mean the decay of society as we know it and could only corrupt others. (6)

The threat that Lin's lesbian identity poses to her role as a mother reminds the audience that the freedom the 20th century characters seem to have over their choices about sexuality and identity is somewhat superficial.

Furthermore, when compared to Ellen, the Victorian governess, who hides her lesbian identity, Lin's situation seems equally oppressive, albeit in a different way. Ellen earns a living caring for other people's children, even though she has no interest in mothering, a point that emerges when she tries to express her love for Betty near the end of act one:

> ELLEN. I don't want children, I don't like children. I just want to be alone with you, Betty, and sing for you and kiss you because I love you, Betty.
>
> BETTY. I love you, too, Ellen. But women have their duty as

soldiers have. You must be a mother if you can. (281)[37]

Betty doesn't acknowledge Ellen's lesbian desires, reflecting what Yvonne Knibiehler argues was a lack of either "the concept [or] the word" for lesbianism in 19th century culture (356). Ultimately, no one perceives Ellen as a threat because she does not openly challenge societal norms. Yet because Lin openly challenges those norms, she may be deemed unfit to care for her own child, despite her obvious commitment to her daughter's well-being and her interest in mothering. Lin's active role as a mother also contrasts with 19th century Betty's performance of her role of mother, further questioning the standards of acceptable behavior and the definition of motherhood.

As a mother in the 19th century, Betty does not do much mothering. She doesn't seem particularly interested in spending time with her children, pawning them off on Ellen or her mother, to control. Children are a part of her societal role, but not a part of her life. When she introduces herself in the opening scene of the play, she says,

I live for Clive, the whole aim of my life
Is to be what he looks for in a wife,
And what men want is what I want to be. (251)

The description shows Betty's need to fit in and fulfill her duty as prescribed by her culture. She spends her days reading, playing the piano, and letting the nanny care for the children, a life she finds monotonous.

Throughout the first act, characters are defined by their roles, rather than as individuals. The isolation that comes from Betty's dedicated performance of her duty results in antipathy for other women, failing to see them as anything but their functions; when she notes that she looks forward to Harry Bagley's arrival because he will "break the monotony," Clive says, "You have your mother. You have Ellen," to which Betty replies, "Ellen is a governess. My mother is my mother" (253-254).

Her role also means a rejection of her own desires. For example, the dashing explorer, Harry Bagley, in an attempt to thwart Betty's sexual advances tells her, "You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife" (268). Her various roles dictate her choices, and none of them gives her room to be what she wants to be. Maud challenges Betty's amorous interest in Harry Bagley, saying, "I don't like what I see. Clive wouldn't like it Betty. I am your mother" (268). Maud's reprimand reinforces not only Betty's duty to obey her husband, and her mother, but also establishes her own role as a guardian of appropriate behavior.

In act one, Maud fits the stereotype of controlling mother by attempting to control the domestic environment. She is displaced in a way because she lives in her adult daughter's home, and has to relinquish some of her authority as a result. Nevertheless, she constantly chides Betty for what she sees as inappropriate behavior. Discussing Betty's treatment of the children's nanny, Ellen, Maud says, "You let that girl forget her place, Betty."

BETTY. Mother, she is governess to my son. I know what her place

is. I think my friendship does her good. She is not very happy.

MAUD. Young women are never happy.

BETTY. Mother, what a thing to say.

MAUD. When they're older they look back and see that comparatively speaking they were ecstatic.

BETTY. I'm perfectly happy.

MAUD. You are looking very pretty tonight. You were such a success as a young girl. You have made a most fortunate marriage . . .

BETTY. What a long time they're taking. I always seem to be waiting for the men.

MAUD. Betty you have to learn to be patient. I am patient. My mama was very patient. (258)

Maud's philosophy implies an emphasis on the historical tradition of maintaining the status quo; the pride she takes in accepting her designated role in emulation of her mother, to whom she refers as "an angel" (275), reinforces the continuity of such social structures.

This cycle is also evident earlier in the scene, as Betty and Maud reproduce one another's behavior. Betty warns Ellen to make sure that the children are warm enough because "the night air is deceptive" (256). When Maud enters, she wants to make sure Betty is warm enough, cautioning her daughter that "the night air is deceptive" (256). Betty is annoyed by what she sees as her mother's interference, but

the exchange reveals that both mothers inevitably treat their children in the same way, though the adult daughter resists being mothered. Furthermore, the scene suggests that Betty mothers Ellen in a way, as she mediates the nanny's control of her children.

Later in the act, Betty plays with Ellen, further suggesting their surrogate mother-daughter relationship. Yet the scene also demonstrates that the women are like children in the men's eyes, reinforcing the chain of command.

> (BETTY *takes a ball from the hamper and plays catch with* ELLEN. *Murmurs of surprise and congratulations from the men whenever they catch the ball.*)
>
> EDWARD. Mama, don't play. You know you can't catch a ball.
>
> BETTY. He's perfectly right. I can't throw either. (BETTY *sits down.* ELLEN *has the ball.*)
>
> EDWARD. Ellen, don't you play either. You're no good. You spoil it.
>
> (EDWARD *takes* VICTORIA *from* HARRY *and gives* HER *to* ELLEN. HE *takes the ball and throws it to* HARRY. HARRY, CLIVE *and* EDWARD *play ball.*)
>
> BETTY. Ellen come and sit with me. We'll be spectators.
>
> (EDWARD *misses the ball*) (265)

By playing ball, the women violate the accepted order. The fact that Edward, a child, demands that they stop, and Betty's admission that she's no good at it, though she

was throwing and catching quite well, reveals that, as a male, Edward actually has more agency than his mother or his nanny in situations that are considered to be a male domain. Yet Edward cannot comfortably fit into the male scheme of things, reminding the audience of the struggle most of the characters in this environment face in trying to fit into the established order.

20th century Betty has a slightly different relationship to her children, as her role becomes one of more direct intervention in their lives. True to the groundwork laid in act one, Betty reproduces her own mother's behavior in her efforts to control her children's lives. For example, in her first appearance in act two, she tells Lin, "I think Victoria's very pretty but she doesn't make the most of herself, do you darling . . . I like your skirt dear but your shoes won't do at all" (294). Later she tries to control her son-in-law Martin's care of Tommy:

> BETTY. And poor little Tommy, I hear he doesn't sleep properly and he's had a cough.
>
> MARTIN. No, he's fine, Betty, thank you . . .
>
> BETTY. Well Tommy has got a nasty cough, Martin, whatever you say.
>
> EDWARD. He's over that. He's got some medicine.
>
> MARTIN. He takes it in Ribena.
>
> BETTY. Well I'm glad to hear it. (314)

Thus at the beginning of the act, Betty continues to conform to her designated role,

performing what reads as almost a parody of her own mother.

Betty's individuality is something she discovers over the course of act two. Her first step towards breaking out of this role is her decision to leave her husband, news that shocks her children, in part because of the way it affects their own roles, as Edward bemoans, "They're going to want so much attention" (295). Near the end of the play, Betty suggests getting a house in which she could live with Victoria, Edward, Lin, and the children, expressing a desire to be a part of their newly configured family; although she still seems resistant to accepting the true nature of the sexual relationships within that family, she has to admit, "You do seem to have such fun all of you" (317). Her evident longing to have some fun herself suggests that she is moving closer to making decisions for herself based on what she would like, rather than what she is required, to do.

It is clear, however, that breaking out of her role depends not only on her willingness, or ability, to see herself differently, but also on the ability of others to see her as something other than her role. Victoria, who has expressed dislike for her mother throughout act two, wondering at one point, "Does everybody hate their mothers?" (296), resists the change.

> VIC. I don't want to live with my mother.
>
> LIN. Don't think of her as your mother, think of her as Betty.
>
> VIC. But she thinks of herself as my mother.
>
> BETTY. But I am your mother.

VIC. But Mummy we don't even like each other.

BETTY. We might begin to. (317)

Though it is clearly difficult for Victoria to imagine Betty as anything but her mother, she does try. Later in the scene, she asks, "Betty, would you like an ice cream?" (318); Victoria's willingness to acknowledge her mother as "Betty" gives Betty the freedom to move forward with her shifting identity, and contributes to changes in Victoria's identity as well.

Throughout the final scene, Betty engages with the characters from both the present and the past, sorting out her new identity in relation to them; as Kritzer suggests, "Betty's recognition of her value as a 'separate person' leads to a new plane of activity, in which she tries new patterns of relating" (Kritzer 126). Her exchange with Gerry is particularly important because he is, for the most part, stranger, though she recognizes him as Edward's former "flatmate." Nevertheless, Betty takes a risk; she is, in fact, trying to pick up Gerry, unaware that he is gay, and her boldness signifies her newfound ability to pursue her desires.

The encounter between these two characters occurs in different locations in the British and American versions of the play, and many critics have suggested that the change of the scene's placement affects the overall thematic implications of the play. The crucial difference is that the placement of Betty's monologue, in which she explicitly states her self-discovery, recognizing that she is an individual, separate from her mother and her husband, comes before the aforementioned conversations with

Victoria in Gerry in the British version, but after those encounters in the U.S. acting version. In her introduction to the revised American edition of *Cloud Nine* (Methuen 1984), Churchill writes,

> There is a lot that is attractive about the New York ending, and it provides more of an emotional climax . . . but on the whole I prefer the play not to end with Betty's self-discovery but with her moving beyond that to a first attempt to make a new relationship with someone else. (ix)

Susan Bennett argues that as a result of the repositioning, Betty becomes a "central character," someone to whom the audience might relate; she writes, "The change in ending is particularly interesting: the adoption of a discourse of American feminism (self-discovery/knowledge) realigned Churchill's materialist critique to address a targeted audience in terms that would meet an American, rather than British, horizon of expectations" (32).

Elin Diamond, on the other hand, suggests that the "actual position of the monologue . . . [does not make] much difference" because the final visual image of the play, in which 20th century Betty embraces 19th century Betty, ultimately conveys the same message ("Refusing" 279). I agree with Diamond's reading in regard to the monologue's placement, though I do not think, as she suggests, that the ending (the embracing Bettys) turns Churchill's "historicist critique" into an "ahistorical romance" (279). Rather, Betty's reconciliation of her two identities

suggests the possibility for a change in the historical trends of gender oppression that have emerged throughout the play. Betty does not reject her Victorian identity but reclaims it. Her emerging sense of individuality includes a recognition of her previous self; Betty is not disclaiming her roles as mother and daughter, though she does abandon her role as a wife, but she accepts them as a part of her identity rather than *as* her identity. Discussing this moment in performance, E. Katherine Kerr says, "It's the greatest gift in the world to be able to turn back to my past every night and embrace it" (qtd. in Dunning C4).

Though the communities presented in *Cloud Nine* seem more fragmented than those in Churchill's earlier history plays, because of the ways in which the characters either close themselves off from each other by submerging their desires (act one), or try to extract themselves from each other in their individual pursuits of free expression (act two), the play ultimately suggests that the value of discovering, and being allowed to develop, one's true identity is that it will create a stronger, more vibrant community, and, perhaps, even effect changes in the ways in which communities are defined and constructed. Churchill says, "This is not in any apparent way related to the experience of *Cloud 9*. But it is chronologically related . . . so it is *obviously* related. My relationship with my mother has become so much better in the course of this whole period. Not apparently *because* of the play, but because I became myself" (qtd. in Thurman 57).

Conclusion

The growing emphasis on the individual in the cultural landscape of the late 1970s is reflected in the structures and themes of Churchill's and Gems's plays at the end of the decade. Efforts to define oneself in relation to one's culture become a central part of the playwrights' examinations of the past and present in each play. *Piaf*, *Queen Christina*, and *Cloud Nine* all explore characters' expectations of themselves and others and the ways in which those characters meet those expectations or shatter them, consciously or unconsciously. Furthermore, by working against the audience's expectations through their choices in regard to structure and casting, both playwrights reinforce the characters' need to define themselves rather than be defined by the culture, as the plays, and thus the characters in them, resist being defined by traditional dramatic structures or conventional representations of history.

By setting *Piaf* and *Queen Christina* strictly in their own historical moments and allowing contemporary references to emerge implicitly through metaphor, Gems produces more conventionally defined history plays. Irving Wardle writes, "The argument [of *Queen Christina*] retains its force because it is fully digested in historical fact" (qtd. in Gems, *Queen* 80), suggesting that the more faithful to history, the more powerful the play's impact. Yet Gems's histories from this period, though conventional on one level, continually disrupt the audience's expectations, and they succeed in challenging more traditional histories of their subjects as a result.

Churchill's approach to history at the end of the decade was less rooted in momentous events from the past than *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar*

Tom, and the characters in *Cloud Nine* are not as obviously embattled as the characters in those previous works. Those in *Cloud Nine* live relatively comfortable lives; they are not the same kind of outsiders as those in the earlier plays. In fact, most of the characters in *Cloud Nine* are not as obviously outside the norms of their society because they expend so much energy trying to blend in. By hiding their true identities more successfully, they manage to get by, even though they feel constricted. The threats are not as dire in an immediate sense, though the consequences of the characters' conformity are shown to be equally dire. There is still a call to action, pointing at the need to change the social structures that define people's roles within their societies, but the change must come from the individual's ability to see the problems and his or her willingness to change them, as Betty recognizes she only needs to accept herself to be herself.

Even though by the late 1970s the revolutionary spirit that had flourished at the beginning of the decade was fading from the landscape, both playwrights' work have an air of rebellion about them: Christina refuses to give in, even though the end of the play suggests that she will continue to face difficulties in establishing her identity; Edith Piaf lives on her own terms to a certain extent, "refusing to abandon her loyalty to her class origins" (Wandor, *Carry* 163); the characters in *Cloud Nine* seek, and discover, new ways of expressing themselves despite cultural constrictions. By the 1980s, Churchill's and Gems's plays would reflect a sense of the loss of the spirit of revolution, though they would attempt to inspire audience's to reflect on

that loss and thus act as calls to change.

Chapter 4

1980-1984: "Well, we've seen the result of all that": Feminism & Family in Mrs. Thatcher's England

As the Tory government led by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s continued its drive to institute new policies for a stronger economy and greater national security, infused by its professed "respect for and devotion to the rights of the individual" (Hamilton 18), the spirit of revolution that had flourished in the 1960s and 1970s faded away under the strain of it all. Michelene Wandor writes that "from 1979 onwards . . . with Thatcherism and a long period of Conservative government, individualism has become deeply entrenched in our social ideology" ("Women" 63).

In the first half of the decade, Churchill and Gems both wrote plays that directly interrogate this intensely self-centered society. Whereas the playwrights explore the process of self-discovery in *Piaf*, *Queen Christina*, and *Cloud Nine*, in *Top Girls* and *Loving Women* they suggest that individualism obscures self-reflection because it leads to a denial of the larger community; no one wants to look too closely at themselves or the world around them. Denying identity becomes key, as both Marlene (*Top Girls*) and Crystal (*Loving Women*) actively try to distance themselves from their working class backgrounds once they are successful financially.

By 1981, cuts in services, rising unemployment, and increases in sales tax all contributed to burdens placed squarely on the working class in Great Britain and often resulted in riots in different parts of the nation. In 1980, the "Education Act

remove[d] obligation on local education authorities to provide school milk and meals" (Johnson 502). By 1982 unemployment in Great Britain rose "above three million for [the] first time since 1933" (Johnson 502), up by one million in the span of just two years. According to Leslie Hannah,

> The worsening educational plight of the underprivileged was paralleled by a deterioration in their relative economic status, as inequality increased in the 1980s. While this was a worldwide phenomenon . . . the tax and benefit policies of the Thatcher years meant that British trend to greater inequality were extreme. The poorest 20 percent of households hardly shared in the general prosperity of these years and, relatively, they became significantly worse off. (348)

Mrs. Thatcher's insistence that "what ultimately matters to most people is the effect on their lives of the corrosive and persistent loss in the value of money" (Butt, "Why" 14) led to the institution of policies that ultimately contributed to the growing divide between classes.

Though in 1979 Thatcher "insisted . . . that the Conservatives' proposals for trade union reform were 'modest'" (Comfort, "Tory" 1), by 1981, the "Employment Act outlaw[ing of] secondary picketing of industrial disputes" and other restrictions on unions that made challenging management more difficult (Johnson 502), led to riots in the northern part of the country. Characterizations of the trade unions in 1984 as "the enemy within," socialist-inclined organizations that posed a "great . . .

threat to democracy" (Aitken n.p.), contributed to the weakening status of unions and subsequent difficulties for working men and women throughout the United Kingdom for the remainder of the decade.

The "success" of the invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982 marked a critical turning point, as Thatcher's popularity increased dramatically in the polls and her "iron lady" persona was reinvigorated. The battle cry "we won't back down" carried on throughout the decade, as seen in her bloody solution to the miners' strike in northern England in 1984-1985. Furthermore, her renewed popularity allowed her to go forward with the drive to privatize national industries, such as British Telecom (1984) and British Gas (1986). Leslie Hannah writes, "The privatization programme was one which was distinctively Thatcherite, though it was not wholeheartedly adopted until after her second election victory [1983], when both its feasibility and popularity were evident" (351). Though these changes often resulted in increased productivity, they also "resulted in real price increases for small consumers" (Hannah 352).

In 1982, Gems's plays *The Treat* and *Aunt Mary* were produced and critics generally responded negatively. For example, in his review of *Aunt Mary*, Irving Wardle writes,

> Having been taken to task regularly by feminists for my benign critical responses to the work of Pam Gems, and receiving another letter of complaint over my last tolerant acknowledgment of a Pam Gems

> offering at the ICA, I am prepared to admit that I am becoming as disillusioned as my attackers. Miss Gems is obviously intrigued by perversity, whether it might concern the sexual abuse of dead women by men or the odd upbringing of a Swedish Queen or, now, a colony of happy transsexual and transvestite writers . . . in Birmingham. ("Aunt Mary" 1982)

Gems's adaptation of Dumas's *Camille* was produced in 1984 to mixed reviews. Also in 1984, a re-working of her 1976 play *The Project*, now called *Loving Women*, was produced; this time the critics were generally effluvious. Both Michael Coveney and Rosalind Carne refer to it as Gems's "best play to date" (Coveney, "Loving" 9; Carne 30).

Churchill's *Three More Sleepless Nights* was staged at the SoHo Poly in 1980 and a television script, *Crimes*, aired in 1981. Both plays received lukewarm reviews, with several critics praising Churchill's skillful dialogue but criticizing her structural choices.[38] In 1982 *Top Girls* was produced at the Royal Court, and it was generally praised for both its content and its ingenious structure, though the most positive responses came in reviews of its 1983 revival; Max Stafford-Clark notes, "It was not an immediate box office hit. We then took it to America . . . where it was billed as a huge London success . . . We then returned to the Royal Court with it, where it was billed as a huge American success, and the play was very successful" (qtd. in Goodman, "Overlapping" 76). About the 1983 revival at the Royal Court Michael

Billington writes, "this is the best British play ever from a woman dramatist" (qtd. in Fitzsimmons 59).

Top Girls and *Loving Women* both address the legacy of second wave feminism and the struggle to find new ways to flourish in a culture that was becoming increasingly hostile to socialist solutions to the problems. As Antoinette Burton writes in her 1992 essay "'History is Now,'" "the women's movement of the 1960s to the 1980s is (already) in the process of being 'historicized.'" (32). These two plays are an example of such historicizing because they both treat the present as an historical moment by creating structures that locate the action very specifically in its own place and in relation to previous times and places, and the characters' attitudes about feminism and women's roles in society are central to the themes in both.

Rosemary Atkins's 1978 article "The 21 Women Who Broke the Sex Barrier," published in the *Sunday Times*, illustrates the ways in which feminism and the women's movement were being historicized even at the end of the 1970s. In the article, Atkins interviews twenty-one women, each of whom was the first woman to "enter various male preserves such as driving London buses or becoming president of the [British Medical Association]" ("Ten Years" 27). In the introduction to the article, the editors note that among the women interviewed

> there was unanimous support for equality of education, job opportunities and pay . . . Only two described themselves openly as "feminists," while 10 said they definitely weren't and three didn't know

> what the word meant . . . Nearly all thought it has become progressively easier for women to work in their jobs, but several had strong male barriers to break through before becoming Britain's "first lady" in their chosen field. (Atkins 31)

Several of the actual responses of the interviewees reveal rather caustic attitudes towards feminism, while others are simply dismissive of the role of the women's movement in achieving (or at least making progress towards achieving) equality opportunities in employment.

For example, Jill Viner says that feminists "want everything and are not prepared to give for it" (31); Margery Hurst claims that feminists "make rules for women that women don't want themselves" (31); and Meriel Tufnell goes so far as to state, "I'm anti-women's lib. I don't know what women are standing up for. Nothing in my life has been geared to beating men—I'm honoured to have been allowed to do what men have been doing for so long" (33). Others, such as Joy Langdon, simply believe that "everything comes in time without women's lib" (qtd. in Atkins 31).

The predominant theme of the piece, however, seems to be that of the power of the individual to get wherever she wants if she works hard enough. Hurst and Tufnell both make comments that sound very much like Marlene in Churchill's *Top Girls*. Hurst believes "if you have the brains and the wherewithal you can get on" (31); Tufnell, who refuses to hire females to run her stables because they are not "as

capable" as males, feels that "women can get anywhere they want if they have the character" (33). Of course, Mrs. Thatcher also dismissed feminism as "too strident" in 1978, noting that "You don't say: 'I must get on because I'm a woman.' You should say you must get on because you have the right talents for the job. The moment you exaggerate you defeat your case" (qtd. in Eddison 16).

The idea that some women seeking equality in the workplace were actually seeking preferential treatment contributed to conflicts surrounding maternity rights for working women in both Great Britain and the United States. In the May 19, 1980 issue of *Newsweek*, in an article entitled "The Superwoman Squeeze," Betty Friedan notes that "We [the U.S.] are one of the few developed nations in the world that does not have serious child-care programs. We force women to make agonizing choices" (qtd. in Langway 73). Friedan, whose book *The Second Stage* was published in 1982, believed that many women were "merely shifting their focus from home and family to job or career, exchanging one half-life for another" as a result of their "extreme reaction against almost every aspect of the housewife-mother service role" (qtd. in Perrick, "Now" 8). The same year, *London Times* reporter Penny Perrick wrote that Friedan had fallen out of favor with the American "hardcore feminist movement" because of her choice "to affirm that women are 'different' and 'special'" (8).

On the other hand, British feminists throughout the 1970s and early 1980s were, in general, more aligned with Friedan's position: equal does not mean

identical. For example, in 1976 Helene Hayman, the first MP in Parliament to have a baby while in office, caused a stir by bringing her baby to work with her and breastfeeding him in the Lady Members' Room. According to an article in *Punch* magazine, "a crusty Tory lady ordered Labour's Helene Hayman out for breast-feeding her new-born baby boy. The child was, the Tory explained, technically a 'stranger' and therefore not allowed in the room" (n.p.). In this same article the author notes that "'women's issues' . . . generally means things like creches, family income supplement and abortion"—all issues directly connected to motherhood and women's reproductive rights. The implication is that for some British feminists, accommodations for working mothers were central to the movement's equal rights agenda, whereas, according to Nora Ephron, describing Betty Friedan in 1973, "in the [American] women's movement, to be called the mother of anything is rarely a compliment" (qtd. in Perrick, "Now" 8).

Yet British society was not necessarily any more tolerant or willing to accommodate working mothers than American society. In 1979, the *Daily Telegraph* reported on several cases in which women were fired from their jobs because they had gotten pregnant. Often the women noted that when they interviewed for jobs they had to promise their prospective employers that they either had no interest in having children or would put off having children for a few years in order to gain employment. In some cases the tribunals found in favor of the women who had been dismissed from their jobs, agreeing that they had been treated unfairly.[39] In the

case of an air stewardess, however,

> the tribunal rejected her claim because the airline was able to show the pregnancy made her incapable of doing the work for which she was employed and there was not a suitable alternative job available. As she had not been employed by the firm for the statutory two-year period [she] was unable to claim under the employment protection legislation for maternity leave and pay and the right to return to her job after the birth of her child. ("Sacked" 8)

By 1982, once the Employment Bill of 1980 had been put into effect, working mothers found negotiating maternity laws even more difficult due to the stricter regulations about the qualifications for acquiring such leave and the increased amount of paperwork that pregnant women were required to file in order to obtain leave and apply for reinstatement after said leave. In her article "Sack Her: She's Pregnant," Johanna Fawkes writes that many of the tribunals' findings

> reinforc[ed] the idea that pregnant women are 'natural' for redundancy . . . In one case the tribunal actually ruled that the employer had been acting in the interest of the applicant's family by not taking her back into employment. The tribunal had decided that this was reasonable 'having regard to her personal obligations at home'! It is hardly likely that such . . . remarks could have been made to a new father. (8)

Clearly the challenges for women to balance work outside the home and

motherhood were still significant, not only legally, but also in terms of cultural perceptions about those choices.

In 1991, Churchill said that in looking back at *Top Girls* she considered it "in a sense . . . a history play now, since it is so specifically set at the beginning of the eighties" (qtd. in O'Kelly, "Top" 2). I would argue that it was a history play even at the time of its original production. Though Meenakshi Ponnuswami writes that "after writing *Vinegar Tom* and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* in 1976, Churchill seems to have moved away from both social history and realism" (41), *Top Girls* presents a social history of Churchill's own time and place, and it evokes the past through the characters present in the dinner sequence at the beginning of the play. The merging of the various histories is played realistically, despite the fact that such a meeting would be impossible in reality. As a result, the present also becomes an historical period that is presented for examination.

The play works with the conventions of realism in a way that Churchill had not previously worked. Churchill manipulates the structure of the well-made play to produce a critical distance between the audience and the present, as the final scene upends their perceptions of the heroine, Marlene. In forcing the audience to reconsider their assessment of Marlene, Churchill also forces them to look more critically at the society of which Marlene is a product; the audience must thus confront the ways in which such attitudes are being produced in the very moment they see the play, for their responses have, essentially, been a product of the very

same environment.

Gems also toys with a traditional structure for effect in her 1984 play *Loving Women*. According to Susan Carlson, "Gems relies on her audience's experience with the comic tradition: i.e., viewers expect one of the women to get Frank and one to lose him. There is dissonance in the pattern of expectations when this does not happen; and in catching her viewers off-guard, Gems can more convincingly discredit conventional relationships" (*Women* 182). As Churchill does in *Top Girls*, Gems allows the audience to engage in a comfortable relationship with the play until the final scene. By springing the structural disruption on them in this way, she distances them from the action; the present thus becomes a specific historical moment on the stage, seen in direct relation to the recent past.

Loving Women critiques the feminist movement in a way that is slightly different from *Top Girls*, though both suggest that by the 1980s "early successes [within the feminist movement] had led to later perceptions that the struggle for equality was over" (Aston 14). The ways in which motherhood fits into this struggle becomes a central part of the examination of second-wave feminism's legacy in both plays. The plays also suggest that the definition of a mother has become increasingly difficult to pin down. Several of the characters in *Top Girls* are simultaneously mothers and not mothers; some have borne children but have not had the experience of raising those children, while others have raised other women's children as their own. In *Loving Women*, though the characters positions as mothers or not are

less tenuous than those in *Top Girls*, the ways in which the characters imagine and perform motherhood undergo radical changes over a relatively short period of time (ten years). The characters' struggles in the worlds of both plays to balance the demands of their public and private lives connects specifically to issues of power, class, and gender identity and the ways in which not only women's but also men's roles are traditionally configured.

Additionally both playwrights use history in a similar way in these works from the early 1980s, though Churchill's play is more adventurous structurally. Though Churchill employed a similar technique in *Cloud Nine*, establishing the present as history, *Top Girls* and *Loving Women* are different because the style of both plays is primarily naturalistic despite the temporal disruptions; there is no farcical treatment of the past in either play, making the use of history more seamless. Churchill's treatment of the historical characters from previous centuries in *Top Girls*, though again clear types, in some cases because they are already literary or artistic symbols, behave differently from those in *Cloud Nine*. They do not call attention to themselves as characters; they do not comment on themselves, and the ways in which they are cross-cast does not function in the same way. Gems also creates recognizable types in the characters of *Loving Women*, but where those types read as "abstractions of their gender identities" (Rudolph 87) in some of the earlier plays, in this case they seem more defined as specific individuals negotiating those identities.

Top Girls: Motherhood and Success

In *Top Girls*, originally produced at the Royal Court Theatre in August 1982, directed by Max Stafford-Clark,[40] Churchill continues to re-imagine the ways in which history can be represented on stage. The play is set solely in the period in which it was written and originally produced. Yet, *Top Girls* is a history play by virtue of its physical inclusion of several characters, real and fictional, from history, literature, and art: Isabella Bird, Lady Nijo, Brueghel's Dull Gret, Pope Joan, and Chaucer's Patient Griselda. The play begins with a scene in which these women gather to celebrate the protagonist Marlene's recent promotion. The opening scene of *Top Girls*, by introducing historical characters, positions Marlene in an historical moment in relation to various other historical moments. The focus on history at the opening of the play combines with Marlene's predictions about the "stupendous" 1980s to come in the final scene of the play to reinforce, structurally and thematically, the primacy of history in this play.

Unlike Churchill's earlier history plays, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar Tom*, there is not any concern for naturalistic representations of history; women from a variety of times and places are brought together in England in the 1980s, removed from their own historical contexts while simultaneously presenting a juxtaposition of their collective histories. *Top Girls*, then, is a history play that, as Harben suggests, carries many pieces of the past into the future, "in [an] effort to drive home the connections between past and present" (255).

Yet there are several readings of *Top Girls* that treat the historical scene as if it were tangential to the rest of the play. For example, Michelene Wandor writes that "The fantasy element in the play, as well as the sleight-of-time manifested in the placing of the final scene, are formally interesting, but they do not alter the fundamental dynamic, which would be there still *even if the first scene was cut*, and the final scene put into its 'correct' time order" (*Carry* 173, emphasis added). Wandor argues that the "fundamental dynamic" of the play is "the bourgeois feminist dynamic" (173), which she defines as an ideology that "accepts the world as it is," and "asserts that women, if they really want to, and try hard enough, can make it to the top" (134). Her argument for this interpretation rests primarily on her claims that both the historical and the contemporary characters accept "entire existential responsibility for what [they] have done" (172-173). Though such a reading of the characters' attitudes about their individual choices is defensible, I believe that Churchill encourages an examination of these very attitudes through the formal structure of the play; the juxtaposition of the past and the present forces the audience to consider the prevailing cultural attitudes that shape the women's beliefs about themselves.

Furthermore, a chronological structure would not lead audiences to the same conclusions about Marlene, or themselves. Because the final scene returns the characters, and the audience, to the past, albeit a recent one, the first scene works in parallel to it, contrasting Marlene's imagined sisterhood with the historical characters

to her actual sisterhood with Joyce in what is also an historical moment in Marlene's immediate past. The opening scene in which Marlene communes with her figurative sisters over an elaborate dinner in a chic restaurant stands in sharp contrast to the final scene, which dramatizes the lack of communion between Marlene and her actual sister in Joyce's shabby working-class kitchen, where there is no food and the only alcohol to be had is a bottle of whiskey that Marlene has brought with her. Finally, both scenes represent a reliving of the past through conversation, as the women in each share stories of their lives and reflect on the choices that they made, or on ones that were made for them, raising questions about culture and history. The final scene is the earliest scene chronologically, and it directly connects to the opening celebration, which Churchill says must show that Marlene "is happy and confident about what she is doing, and the dinner party a year later would confirm to her that her predictions of success were right" (qtd. in Fitzsimmons 64). The original construction of the play allows these two scenes to act as bookends thematically, but it also works structurally to make *Top Girls* a history play as past, present, and future converge.

Jane de Gay claims that the Open University/BBC video production of *Top Girls*, by switching the order of the first and second scenes from the stage version, "affects our perception of the play [because] the first scene helps to establish the themes of the play as a whole. The interview scene foregrounds issues of personal presentation, money and career aspirations, especially as they affect women" (103).

De Gay's reading of the play's themes differs from mine; nevertheless, the original first scene—the dinner party—can also establish the thematic issues that de Gay explores. Yet the displacement of it de-emphasizes history, and weakens the thematic points about history as well as the structural emphasis on the past and the future that is established by the original order of scenes.

The scene immediately following Marlene's promotion party provides a look at Marlene's professional persona, revealing an absence of the sisterly solidarity that pervades the prologue. Act one, scene two takes place at the Top Girls Employment Agency on Marlene's first day in her new position. The scene is very brief, as Marlene conducts an interview with a young woman named Jeanine. Many critics have touched upon Marlene's callous treatment of the women she interviews, noting that she has little respect for other women. For example, Amelia Howe Kritzer writes, "Marlene defends the power base she has acquired by patronizing, intimidating, and further narrowing the options of women who come seeking opportunity" (145).

When Jeanine tells Marlene that she wants to make more money because she is saving to get married, the conversation takes a turn that reveals Marlene's bias against this type of woman. Marlene is very concerned that Jeanine not mention her marriage plans because prospective employers will likely not hire a young woman who is planning to marry, ultimately because that means she will want to take time off to have children.

MARLENE. Does that mean you don't want a long-term job, Jeanine?

JEANINE. I might do.

MARLENE. Because where do the prospects come in? No kids for a bit?

JEANINE. Oh no, not kids, not yet.

MARLENE. So you won't tell them you're getting married?

JEANINE. Had I better not?

MARLENE. It would probably help. (43)

Marlene's concern seems to be her own reputation when she reveals that of the prospective employers is a client to whom Marlene had sent someone before, who then left to have a baby. She warns Jeanine that she "won't want to mention marriage there" (43). Although Marlene's comments indicate that she is complicit in perpetuating such inequities, the larger context should not be overlooked. As previously noted, many women faced this kind of discrimination in the workplace throughout the 1970s; that it has continued into the 1980s suggests that the struggle for equality is far from over, even if women like Marlene have ascended in the ranks.

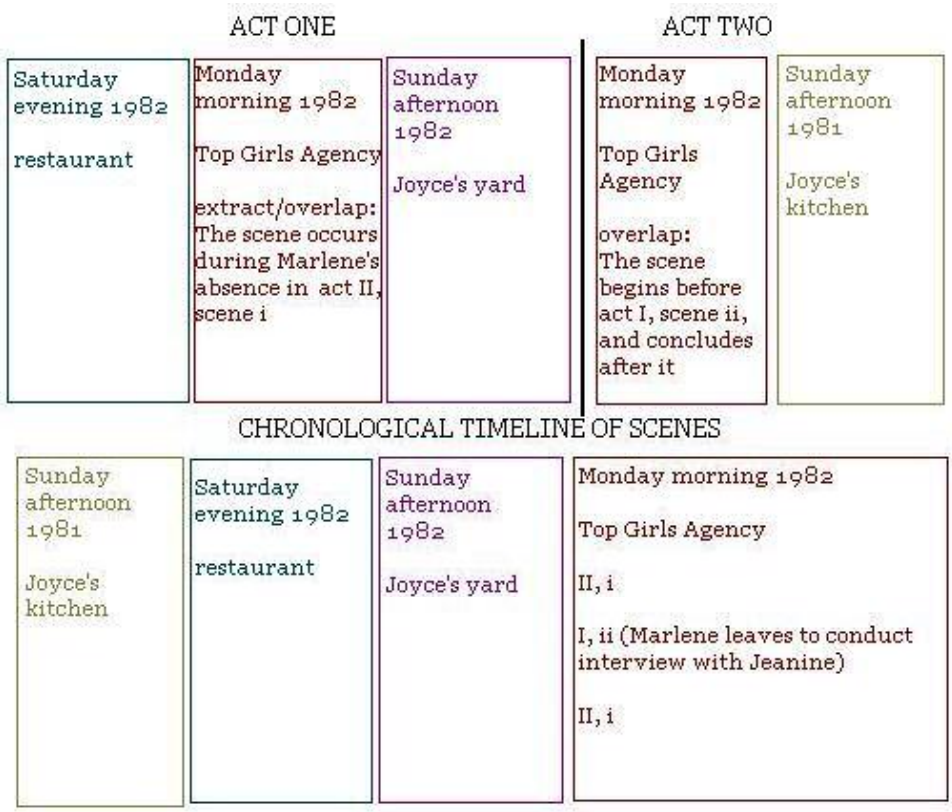
The structure of *Top Girls* is inseparable from its content, and the use of history by presenting characters from the past is key not only to the themes but also to the audience's understanding of the *present* as its own historical moment. Anthony Jenkins claims that "although its concluding scene occurs first, chronologically,

events unravel for the most part in linear ways from public restaurant, Marlene's workplace, Joyce's back garden to the enclosed intimacy of a late-night kitchen" (16). There may be a line from public to private spaces that is heightened by the structure of the play, but the chronology is not linear, and the "unraveling" of events is disrupted by both the physical and temporal shifts between domestic and public spaces. Furthermore, it is precisely because Marlene's personal history remains hidden until the final scene that Churchill manages to construct the present as history because Marlene's public persona is finally shown as a construct that emerged from a specific set of material conditions, and the audience must suddenly confront not only Marlene's but also their own place in history.

The overall structure of the play is more complex than the structure of Churchill's other history plays, including *Cloud Nine*. First, there is the dinner scene at the beginning of the play, which is played realistically despite the "impossibility" of such a gathering. In an interview with Renate Klett in 1984, Churchill said, "If you want to bring characters from the past onto the stage then you can do it, without having to find a realistic justification, such as presenting it as Marlene's dream. On stage it is possible for these women to meet and have dinner. In the theatre anything's possible" (62). The stage directions in the script describe the setting: "*Restaurant. Saturday night. There is a table with a white cloth set for dinner with six places. The lights come up on MARLENE and the waitress*" (Churchill, *Top Girls* 11). As the scene progresses, and the characters enter the space one by one, marked by their

costumes as being from different times and places, the audience must negotiate the merging of the various worlds that is occurring on stage.

The remainder of the play is set in a realistic representation of the present, though the structure does not get less complicated. *Top Girls* does not present its story chronologically; rather both acts consist of two scenes (not counting the prologue in Act One), of which the second is chronologically set before the first. Act one, scene two and act two, scene one take place on the same Monday morning at the Top Girls Employment Agency; act one, scene three happens on the previous Sunday; and act two, scene two takes place on a different Sunday from one year earlier.



The manipulation of time, shifting between the past and the present, even in the contemporary scenes, reinforces the connection between the historical women and the women of the present. The flashback device is used for dramatic effect, as the final scene reveals the secret that Marlene is a mother whose desire to move beyond her working-class existence motivated her to give up her child. Marlene's sister Joyce has been raising the child, Angie, as her daughter for fifteen years. In the final scene, Joyce criticizes Marlene's choice, saying, "I don't know how you could leave your own child" (90). Yet, Churchill's criticism in *Top Girls* is not about Marlene's "failure" as a woman because she gave up her role as a mother, but a criticism of a society that forces women to make such choices.

Marlene attempts to persuade Joyce that a woman can have both a successful career and a fulfilling experience of a mother, but Joyce undermines Marlene's claims:

> JOYCE. Turned out all right for you by the look of you. You'd be getting a few thousand less a year.
>
> MARLENE. Not necessarily.
>
> JOYCE. You'd be stuck here/like you said.
>
> MARLENE. I could have taken her with me . . . I know a managing director who's got two children, she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a

great deal of money.

JOYCE. So what's that got to do with you at the age of seventeen? (90)

Joyce's point is striking; a seventeen-year-old single mother does not have many options when it comes to juggling motherhood and a career. Churchill returns to a consideration of history in this final scene by evoking the past of the teenaged Marlene faced with the dilemma of becoming a single mother. As Joyce and Marlene's argument continues, the story of Marlene's past illustrates the point that when Marlene had the child at the end of the 1960s, she would not have had the same options as the "high-powered lady" in the 1980s that she uses as an example of progress:

JOYCE. You . . . said you weren't keeping it. You shouldn't have had it/if you wasn't

MARLENE. Here we go.

JOYCE. going to keep it. You was the most stupid, / for someone so clever you was the most stupid, get yourself pregnant, not go to the doctor, not tell.

MARLENE. You wanted it, you said you were glad, I remember the day, you said I'm glad you never got rid of it, I'll look after it, you said that down by the river. (91)

That the two women discussed Angie's fate "down by the river" hints at the

possibility that Marlene was considering a radical solution to her problem, and suggests a desperation that contradicts her confident attitude in the present world of the play.

This revelation of the details of Marlene's past acts as a reflection of the opening scene in which the historical characters share their life stories. The audience gets no such look at Marlene's life until the final scene with her sister. In fact, upon seeing Angie asleep in the office earlier in act two, Marlene's co-worker Nell, surprised to learn that Marlene has a niece, remarks, "What's she got, brother, sister? She never talks about her family" (76). In some ways, Marlene's existence for most of the play is ahistorical; although the audience has viewed her in the historical context provided by the histories of other women from various times and places, they have not been able to locate Marlene in any moment except the present. The conversation between Marlene and Joyce at the end allows the historical context of the present moment to emerge, and it throws the more recent past into relief against the more distant histories of the women in the opening scene.

The conversation continues to raise questions about women's choices regarding reproduction and mothering, again returning to themes that emerge in the opening segment of the play, as Marlene and Joyce recount their options, decisions, and the repercussions of those decisions. For example, Marlene reveals that she has taken advantage of options that have afforded her greater control over her choices about reproduction, but that may have also curtailed those choices. When Joyce

suggests that Marlene could have a child now that she is financially secure, Marlene says, "I might do . . . I've been on the pill so long I'm probably sterile" (91). The potential for significant side-effects from the Pill and other forms of contraception concerned feminists in the 1970s and 1980s (Rowbotham 62-63). Though such methods surely provide "more reliable . . . means of controlling reproduction" (Rowbotham 63), they also raise questions about the politics of choice as it relates to access and safety.[41]

Additionally, when Joyce reveals that she miscarried when Angie was still an infant, "because I was so tired looking after your fucking baby" (92), Marlene counters by saying, "I've had two abortions, are you interested? Shall I tell you about them? Well, I won't, it's boring, it wasn't a problem" (92). The exchange highlights the complexity of women's relationship to motherhood on various levels: Joyce wants children but cannot carry them to term; she has willingly adopted her sister's daughter as her own, but her description of Angie as "your child" belies an immutable distance from her daughter that informs her engagement in the practice of mothering; Marlene has taken steps to avoid bearing more children, and though she says it wasn't a problem, both her tone and her desire to change the topic suggest that none of the choices she has made, whether giving up Angie or having two abortions, has been easy or without compromise. Ultimately, both women's experiences represent a complex network of social, economic, and biological factors, reflecting the need for what Rowbotham argues is a "quest to dissolve the

boundaries [between social constructions and nature] and to approach maternity as a continuing interaction between physical growth and mental perception" (104).

In an interview with Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koening, Churchill says that "a lot of people have latched on to Marlene leaving her child, which interestingly was something that came very late," noting that, "of course women are pressured to make choices between working and having children in a way that men aren't, so it *is* relevant, but it isn't the main point of it" (77). Though it may not be the "main point" of *Top Girls*, motherhood features prominently from the beginning of the play, as the worlds of careers and motherhood are immediately juxtaposed. Pope Joan introduces the subject of motherhood, recounting the tale of how she bore a child during a procession and was stoned to death as a result of her crime—her crime being that she was female, and women are not allowed to be Pope. Thus, as *Top Girls* begins, there seems to be a special significance placed on the inherent conflict that social institutions create for women who choose to be both workers outside the home and mothers.

It is, in fact, Joan's role as a mother that betrays her secret and leads to her demise. Joan's quip that "Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope" (26), by consigning women to the same camp as those who are too young to be in charge and those who are mentally incompetent, suggests that women are not supposed to hold positions of power. In "The Imagined Woman," Chiara Frugoni writes,

> What is interesting in the story of Joan (originally a legend, but the way

> in which legend was manipulated makes it real history) is the persistence of a twin obsession: first, the fear that a woman might dare to exert male prerogatives—Joan was condemned for sacrilege; second, the fear of a woman's body as a vehicle for perverse seduction—Joan was unmasked by the fruit of her sin. (375)

Churchill's presentation of Joan and her story, then, works on two levels. First, she presents a woman who allegedly became Pope in 855 (and was subsequently murdered for it), introducing history into the play as a means of examining the present. Second, she emphasizes an idea that she originally explored in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar Tom*: by connecting women's reproductive abilities to Eve's sin of bringing sex into the world, social institutions have used motherhood as a means of control by keeping women out of positions of authority because they are regarded as inherently morally inferior.

Ironically, this opening scene is Marlene's fantasy celebration of her own rise to a position of authority. When asked about her recent promotion, Marlene says, "Well it's not Pope but it is managing director," which prompts Lady Nijo to respond with admiration, "Over all the women you work with. And the men" (24). The audience, however, ultimately learns that Marlene has paid a significant price for her status. According to Helene Keyssar, "Marlene is a woman we must take seriously but she is also a woman who accepts male models of success as exemplary and is thus not someone we are meant simply to admire" (98). Marlene's quest for

power and success leads her to the choice to relinquish the role of mother in order to fit into a specific social role. Thus, while the audience may admire Marlene's successful career, they are forced to contemplate the sacrifice she made to achieve it, as well as the ways in which her subsequent choices, including the active distance she maintains from her working-class mother, sister, and daughter/niece, actually reproduce and reinforce certain attitudes about women.

At the celebration, Marlene offers a toast "To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements" (24), focusing on the women's professional strides before the topic of motherhood is introduced into the conversation. Churchill then proceeds to disabuse the audience of the notion of the great advancement of women over the centuries. The women represent a wide variety of cultures, classes and eras, and almost every one of them has a horrifying story about motherhood. Of all the women present, Isabella is the only character who does not have children. The silent waitress may or may not be a mother, but her life is not revealed in any way through dialogue, so the audience has no way of knowing. Marlene is the only character (besides the silent waitress) who refrains from comment; she never mentions she has had a child, nor does she lie.

The stories the characters share are not positive accounts of motherhood. Men exert control over the women and children; often, both mother and child suffer humiliation, subordination, and even death. Some of the characters are mothers only in the sense of having delivered children, never experiencing the day-to-day practice

of mothering because their children were taken away from them shortly after being born. For example, Lady Nijo recounts the tale of how she was forced to give up her daughter because the Emperor, her husband, was not the baby's father; she goes on to note that the two sons she later bore to the priest Ariake were also taken away from her. Patient Griselda's story (as well as her identity) centers on her willingness to give up her children at her husband's request; testing her obedience, Walter, the marquis, sends their daughter away when she is just six weeks old, and their son when he is two years old. Griselda believes the children are going to be murdered because her husband tells her that "the people" were rebelling because the children were nothing more than peasants themselves because of Griselda's previous status as a commoner. Twelve years after her son was taken away, Griselda is reunited with her children, and she is rewarded for her unconditional obedience; upon the revelation of this "happy" ending to Griselda's tale of woe, Nijo weeps, "Nobody gave me back my children" (37). Thus, although these women had the power to bring a life into the world through childbirth, they did not have control over their own lives or the lives of her children, no matter what their status—Pope, marquise, or emperor's concubine.

Though she may not admit it to herself, Marlene, too, is a victim of similar oppression. Though no one literally forced Marlene to give up her child, as both Lady Nijo and Patient Griselda were forced to give up theirs, the audience can sense that the same forces are still at work in Marlene's society; in order to achieve her

current position in the business world, Marlene had to abandon her role as mother because it would be virtually impossible for her to negotiate the two worlds as a single parent in London in the 1970s and 1980s. Lisa Merrill suggests that "by attempting to equate Marlene's promotion at work with the extreme circumstances overcome by the other five guests, Churchill renders Marlene's achievement petty and ludicrous" (83). I do not think Churchill is suggesting that Marlene's achievements are petty or ludicrous. Rather, the fact remains that Marlene has had to make sacrifices for those achievements; she has not been able to overcome all of the obstacles, none of the women has.

By merging the past and the present, Churchill suggests that women haven't come as far as Marlene would like to believe. Janelle Reinelt writes,

> *Top Girls* is concerned to show how progressive social movements such as feminism can be diluted and accommodated by capitalism . . . the play shows the prices that women throughout history have had to pay for being unique and successful and suggests that contemporary women are also paying a price that may not be desirable. (*After Brecht* 88-89)

It is significant that at the time the play was written and produced, seven years after the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, women in England were still struggling to successfully balance careers and motherhood.

For example, in her discussion in the London newspaper the *Times* about an

American study that showed "among working women, the incidence of coronary heart disease rose as the number of children increased" though that among housewives the group "showed a slight decrease with an increasing number of children," Cary Cooper notes that similar problems existed in Britain at the time because "most working women are expected . . . to fulfill the roles of both home-maker and career person simultaneously" (17). Similarly, E. Ann Kaplan writes in her article "Sex, Work and Motherhood: The Impossible Triangle" (1990):

> Even when they are in heterosexual marriages, women have difficulties linking these three aspects [sex, work, and motherhood] of their lives. But those who are single or recently divorced mothers . . . find even greater odds stacked against them. It has been clear that women's difficulties owe to the lack of facilitating institutions . . . we still do not have adequate, available and inexpensive child care, and flexible and accommodating work schedules. (409)

As a counterpoint to highlight this struggle, Churchill presents Marlene's sister Joyce, a single mother who struggles to support herself and her daughter by working four different cleaning jobs. Joyce is a casualty of the same society in which Marlene is a success. When she took Marlene's child, she was married; however, by the time Angie was twelve, Joyce was on her own. She keeps the child despite the various hardships that she faces as a single parent in a society that offers little accommodation in terms of flexible work or affordable childcare.

Churchill's critique of the present is explicit in *Top Girls*. The connection made to historical women at the beginning of the play crystallizes in the final scene. In a heated argument with Joyce, Marlene says that

> This country needs to stop whining. / Monetarism is not ,. . . stupid. It takes time, determination. No more slop. / And
>
> JOYCE. Well I think they're filthy bastards.
>
> MARLENE. who's got to drive it on? First woman prime minister. Terrifico. Aces. Right on. / You must admit. Certainly gets my vote.
>
> JOYCE. What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina . . .
>
> MARLENE. Bosses still walking on the worker's faces? Still dadda's little parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself? I believe in the individual. Look at me.
>
> JOYCE. I am looking at you. (95)

It is ironic that Marlene believes in the power of the individual when she has had to shed a part of her own identity in order to succeed. Her veneration of Thatcher as a role model for women is disturbing, especially in Joyce's opinion. Thatcher, like Marlene, represents a woman who has gained her position in society only by downplaying her femininity, as is indicated by her "Iron Lady" persona. If Thatcher is one of the historical figures who represent how far women have come, *Top Girls*

seems to suggest, the notion of equal opportunity is a fraud; the only way women can move up in the system is to become more like men, and that is not truly equality.

Furthermore, despite the physical absence of men, *Top Girls* is the only one of Churchill's plays in which there are no male characters on stage, their presence looms powerfully, as most of the women's choices and attitudes have clearly been defined in relation to men. The women's stories in the opening scene, for example, often center on the choices that were made for them by men, particularly fathers and husbands. Additionally, that two of the characters at dinner are literally male creations, characters in works by Chaucer[42] and Breughel, suggests that women have historically lacked control over the representation of themselves in art and literature. That they are being re-imagined in a work by a female writer allows them to take on a new life as they reflect on their stories from a new, female, perspective.

Throughout the play absent men, such as Marlene and Joyce's father; Angie's unnamed, unmentioned biological father, as well as her adopted father, Joyce's ex-husband; and Marlene's colleague Howard Kidd exert influence over the women's lives, sometimes specifically because of that very absence. Most of the women in the play are shown fending for themselves in a society that does not grant them the same freedom or authority it grants men.

When women do rise to positions of power, they are criticized for moving beyond their sphere and usurping the authority of men. In act two, Mrs. Kidd comes to visit Marlene to request that she let her husband Howard have the

promotion that was granted to Marlene because, she says, without a touch of irony, "he's got a family to support. He's got three children. It's only fair" (69). When Marlene dismisses Mrs. Kidd's request, Mrs. Kidd says, "You're one of those ballbreakers,/that's what you are. You'll end up miserable and lonely. You're not natural" (70). The audience, ostensibly, aligns themselves with Marlene, put off by Mrs. Kidd's all-too-familiar, bogus, anti-feminist argument. Marlene seems to be, in this moment, a victim of skewed perceptions of both equal opportunities and feminism.

Yet when Marlene's choices, and her fiercely self-centered worldview, are revealed at the end of the play, her own views on those subjects become equally suspect. In several different interviews, Churchill mentions the specific connection between *Top Girls* and a visit to the United States in which she found some women's attitudes about feminism disturbing because they believed "women were getting on well . . . because there are a lot of women in executive positions" (qtd. in Simon 126), and that "was such a different attitude from anything I'd ever met here [in England], where feminism tends to be much more connected with socialism and not so much to do with women succeeding on the sort of capitalist ladder" (qtd. in Truss 8). *Top Girls* implicates American culture directly in its historical portrait, suggesting a strong socio-political link between the United States and Great Britain. The cross-cultural exchange emerges in conversations about Marlene's trip to America; Angie's fascination with Marlene's adventures in the U.S. and her declaration, "I want to be

an American" (86); the mention of the "American-style field" of computers as a place where women will have to compete with "slick fellas" for jobs (72); and Win's comment that "Americans know how to live" (76). In relation to feminist concerns about equal opportunities and motherhood, the American view in the 1980s was already driving toward a "having it all" ethos, and the focus on women who could afford, financially, to make such choices presents a glamorized representation of the possibility of doing so.

Though Churchill also writes that the argument between Joyce and Marlene in the final scene is "exaggerated and oversimplified on both sides," (qtd. in Fitzsimmons 64), the implications about Angie's future, which Marlene has pronounced in act two, scene one, force the audience to consider the ways in which Marlene's brand of feminism reproduces existing power structures rather than challenging them. At the end of act two, scene one, Marlene dismisses Angie, saying, "She's not going to make it" (77). This line is, chronologically speaking, the final statement of the action of the play. When Marlene says it, the audience is not aware of the truth about her relationship to Angie, but it is distressing nevertheless. Angie has shown intense affection for Marlene; in act one she shares her fantasy with Kit that "I think I'm my aunt's child. I think my mother's really my aunt" (52). In act two, Angie has traveled to London by herself, specifically to see Marlene, saying, "It's where I most want to be in the world" (70). Thus, whether the audience recognizes Angie as Marlene's daughter or her niece, Marlene's rejection of her

seems harsh, and Marlene's commitment to other women becomes suspect.

The final scene reveals that Joyce is not any more confident about Angie's chances of making it, but her reasons for feeling this way are different from Marlene's. Her attitude about Angie's grim future is also different.

> MARLENE. If they're stupid or lazy or frightened, I'm not going to help them get a job, why should I?
>
> JOYCE. What about Angie?
>
> MARLENE. What about Angie?
>
> JOYCE. She's stupid, lazy and frightened, so what about her?
>
> MARLENE. You run her down too much. She'll be fine.
>
> JOYCE. I don't expect so, no. I expect her children will say what a wasted life she had. If she has children. Because nothing's changed and won't with them in. (97)

Joyce wants to find a way to increase Angie's chances, but, even though in this scene Marlene suggests Angie will find a way to make it, in the end she simply writes off her niece/daughter like an under-qualified applicant at her agency.

Churchill's critique in *Top Girls* works on many levels, including pointing out flaws in the capitalist, consumer-driven society that reveres individuality over community, and social institutions that profess to espouse equal rights but ultimately fail to accommodate women with children. By introducing characters from various times and places, Churchill shows that women have been subject to such restrictive

structures throughout history. By treating the present as history, she encourages the audience to consider how these structures continue to be produced and suggests that feminism still has a way to go on the road to change.

Loving Women: Feminism and the Family Re-Imagined

Pam Gems's *Loving Women*, first produced at the Arts Theatre in February 1984, is a comedy that imagines the expansion of the traditional nuclear family. The play, adapted from Gems's 1976 play *The Project*, simultaneously promotes and challenges feminist and socialist politics, placing an emphasis on the need to reconcile the theoretical and the practical. The themes are reinforced by the play's structure, an inversion of the traditional comic format. By manipulating a style with which the audience is familiar, Gems allows the structure of the piece to embody the themes because the audience must actively negotiate the disruption of their expectations, calling into question their perceptions about feminism and family.

The play deviates from Gems's biographical history format, firmly established in the previous decade with plays like *Piaf* and *Queen Christina*. *Loving Women* is an examination of its own historical moment that centers on three characters: two women, Susannah and Crystal, and one man, Frank. The two-act play follows the lives of the characters from 1973 and 1974 in act one to 1984 in act two. There are no actual historical figures in the play, but the characters in their historical moments are akin to Churchill's "every(wo)man" characters in *Vinegar Tom* and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* or to Gems's own characters in *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*. Because the

second act is set in 1984, the same year the play was produced the audience must ultimately confront itself and its role in the production of history.

The story at the center of the play is the love triangle from *Dusa, Stas, Fish & Vi*, expanded and re-imagined. Susannah and Frank are middle-class leftist activists who work together as social workers, running a community center for school-aged children. Crystal, a working-class hairdresser, has been hired by Susannah to look after Frank while he recovers from an unspecified illness. Frank ultimately leaves Susannah for Crystal, marrying her and starting a family. Susannah commits herself to her work and leaves England, and by act two she resents the fact that she has no children of her own. Gems returns to themes and characters that she explored in *Dusa*, but instead of seeing no way out now presents a solution, albeit an unconventional one, that may accommodate each character's desires. In *Loving Women*, Susannah is a Fish who survives by uniting with her rival, Crystal, in a surprising twist at the end of the play.

The decor of the apartment that is the setting in the opening scene conveys a shorthand representation of the kinds of people who inhabit the space. The posters of Mao and Che in scene one represent the shared political commitment that is the foundation for Susannah and Frank's relationship. These are replaced by posters of "Mucha girls" in scene two, indicating the shift to a more sensual, less cerebral, relationship between Crystal and Frank. The posters and the furniture reflect not only a difference in the women's aesthetics and politics, but also in the nature of

each woman's relationship with Frank.

Gems marks the differences between the two women physically as well, setting them up as identifiable types. Susannah is plain and dressed in a nondescript, gender-neutral manner. Crystal is beautiful and sexy, hyper-feminine. Gems's description of their costumes makes them historical characters because the kinds of clothes they wear are direct reflections of fashions of the period that communicate something about them simply by virtue of the style. For example, Susannah's "battered anorak" has a specific feeling about it; describing the attendees at a Communist Party of Great Britain meeting to discuss the role of feminism within socialism in 1977, Alan Hamilton writes, "The audience was predominantly female, many with long hair, gold-rimmed glasses and duffel coats" (12). Crystal's donning of a Laura Ashley dress in scene two signifies a certain middle-class wifeliness that she has adopted with her new role, standing in sharp contrast to her clothes that are "bang on fashion" (159) and her "semi-see-through" silk kimono (166) in scene one.

Ideological differences between the two women are emphasized in their first conversation alone, which focuses primarily on men. Frank remains on stage, but he is wearing headphones, listening to a record that Susannah has brought for him. Crystal complains about "liberated" men, to whom she refers as "your sort of lot" (161), telling Susannah that she was put off by their mechanical approach to sex:

> CRYSTAL. I thought he was going to bring out the manual—Christ, what are they after, good marks or something?

SUSANNAH. You like the man to take the lead?

CRYSTAL. Sure . . . within reason. (162)

Later, when Crystal's sexual relationship with Frank is revealed, it is clear that he does not fall into this category. Frank approaches her aggressively, taking the lead in a way that he ostensibly cannot with Susannah.

Susannah's focus on work pervades the opening scene, reinforcing the notion that the foundation of her relationship with Frank lies in their shared political commitment and activities. Even in the moments where she expresses concern for Frank's health, she links it to their work. When Frank asks when she is coming back, Susannah says, "Tomorrow! (*She hugs hum fiercely*.) I wish it was tomorrow! Don't worry. I'm not about to abandon the fort. I know the last thing you need is some soppy, individualistic gesture . . . " (165). She chooses work and commitment to what she assumes is their common cause over the role of caretaker. This decision is ultimately her downfall, for Frank later admits that "[Crystal] was there when I needed someone" (178).

Throughout the first scene, tension between the women emerges in various ways, and Gems sets up the stereotypical love triangle by positioning the two women as rivals. Susannah tries to subvert Crystal's physical charms by pointing out to Frank that she is not intellectually or ideologically compatible with him. For example, Susannah has invited Crystal to speak to the kids at the center about career choices, but Crystal has refused because, according to Susannah, there's "nothing in

it for her. pretty single-minded really. After some upmarket guy in a sports car. you can understand it, her background's pretty deprived . . . still . . . I mean, they are her own sort" (165). Susannah's characterization of Crystal is in some ways more telling about her own personality than about Crystal's. Crystal lacks political commitment because she is an under-educated, working-class woman who is interested in getting ahead; Susannah's political commitment is supposedly to equality, but her own position as an educated middle-class activist, who takes skiing vacations in Austria, betrays a certain snobbery.

The tug-of-war over Frank is symbolized in the food Crystal feeds him when she re-enters the scene. Susannah is distressed to see Frank eating meat, and Crystal tells her, "Oh I got him off that vegetarian—it's useless! You can get deficiencies, I read it" (165), while Frank greedily eats the meat she serves. When Crystal leaves the room again, Susannah offers to save him from it by "shov[ing] it all in [her] *Evening Standard*" (166), but he admits that he likes it. The connection between politics and sex emerges here, as vegetarianism reads as a specific political choice that Frank rejects in favor of his meat and potatoes; Susannah is the bland diet to Crystal's hearty, spicy meal.

The tension reaches its height when Crystal returns in a flimsy silk kimono and performs for Frank and Susannah. She poses seductively, encouraging them to guess who she is imitating, and it emerges that Frank has a fetish for Marilyn Monroe. It's news to Susannah, who finds the news disturbing because it disrupts

her perceptions about Frank's desires.

> SUSANNAH. Do you really go for her? . . .
>
> FRANK. [*watching* CRYSTAL.] Why not?
>
> SUSANNAH. No reason. You and a few million other guys . . . She was such a sad woman. (167)

The sexual jealousy plays out on two levels, as Frank's attraction to Marilyn Monroe is mirrored in his strict attention to Crystal's performance of Monroe. Susannah cannot compete with either image; she simply sits watching, "wagging her head to the music" (167).

After Susannah exits, on the line "Up the revolution!" (169), the truth about Crystal and Frank's relationship emerges, though it is hardly shocking to the audience at this point. Frank "*grabs her with a sudden, urgent savagery, and they embrace so fiercely that they roll onto the floor*" (170), but he remains distant in his thoughts. From the time Susannah exits through the end of the scene, Frank's only verbal interaction with Crystal is in response to her questions about his state of mind. Frank's silence reinforces the ways in which his physical desire for Crystal contrasts with his intellectual desire for Susannah, and there is a sense that though he feels guilty about his infidelity, he cannot resist the temptation.

In scene two, set one year later, changes to the interior design indicate the change of occupants, revealing Frank's choice of Crystal over Susannah, though at the top of the scene, Susannah is the only person present on the stage. The furniture

has changed, becoming less bohemian, and the political posters are gone, replaced by art prints. Additionally, a mobile and a carrycot indicate the presence of an infant. Susannah's fierce inspection of the surroundings, including examining a wedding photo of Frank and Crystal, establish the continuing tension between the two women.

Crystal has been put in an uncomfortable position because Frank has not yet returned from work, and she is left home with the baby and the visiting Susannah. In an effort to find something to talk about, Crystal suggests that Susannah should come to see the baby, who is sleeping off stage.

> SUSANNAH. Are you feeding her yourself?
>
> CRYSTAL. I did at first—hey, it makes you ever so tired. Anyway, I'm back at work now so she's on the bottle. It's better really. You're more free.
>
> SUSANNAH. You manage all right?
>
> CRYSTAL. Oh yes. I drop her in at the nursery, I'm dead lucky, it's only down the road. Then, pick her up at four, do the shopping, get back in time for Frank's tea. It works very well really. (173)

Crystal's claim that she's lucky sounds like wishful thinking, as her freedom doesn't seem to be particularly liberating. She bears the double burden of raising a child and working outside the home, running all the errands while Frank is out doing his own thing.

The tension continues to build as the women struggle to find common ground and fail. Crystal pretends to take an interest in Susannah's social work, though she cannot remember what exactly Susannah does; Susannah makes Crystal feel guilty by reminding her that Frank abandoned not only his relationship with Susannah but also his relationship with the children at the center. They finally broach the subject of the awkward circumstances:

> CRYSTAL. If it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have met. I mean, it's not as if you and Frank was serious.
>
> SUSANNAH. We weren't married, if that's what you mean.
>
> CRYSTAL. He said you didn't want to.
>
> SUSANNAH. Oh. Well, he certainly never asked.
>
> CRYSTAL. But you're not into it, your lot. You've jacked all that in. (*Pause*) It was his idea, you know, getting married.
>
> SUSANNAH. You didn't think about an abortion?
>
> CRYSTAL. No! I hate it, I wouldn't . . . anyway, I'd be too scared . . . Look, he'd already asked me by then. (174)

By revealing Frank's decision to marry her before she became pregnant, Crystal upsets Susannah's belief that Frank acted out of a sense of obligation rather than desire.

When Frank finally returns home, Susannah confronts him about his choice. He lies, saying that he married Crystal because he had to, but when Susannah calls

him on it, he admits that he married Crystal because she offered him more devotion than Susannah did. He goes on to argue that the world he and Susannah shared as activists was not a real world, challenging their commitment to "the humanist dream," saying,

> Destroy the system . . . our sort? We cultivate it . . . Whatever it was we nourish, it isn't the oppressed. When we arrive, when we knock on all those doors, the tension goes UP! . . . We're social workers. It's us and Valium instead of a housing policy. We got rid of the nuclear family all right—for you and bloody Brian Mason to go and play mothers and fathers with the debris. Till it's time to make the right career choice and move on. (181)

His response to the problems he once tried to change was to revert to a traditional structure rather than trying to imagine new configurations of family. Frank's inability to find new possibilities stems, in part, from his latent adherence to traditional gender roles.

Earlier in the scene, the toll that the struggle to maintain her lifestyle as a working mother and wife is taking on Crystal is revealed when Crystal breaks down, saying, "I've been a bit tired lately, what with working and the baby . . . he's late . . . He promised he'd be back in time" (177). Though she maintains that Frank has changed his priorities, it seems that he has not given up any of his own interests. His late return, she reveals, is not uncommon. Frank enjoys the best of both worlds,

while Crystal finds it difficult to find the time to enjoy either one.

After Frank's spirited call for examining reality, in which he patronizingly says that reading to Crystal makes him "feel real," and admits that he has "trouble keeping up" with Crystal in bed (184), Susannah challenges him:

> SUSANNAH. I notice she does all the cooking and shopping, all the work. What's in it for her?
>
> FRANK. She wants a husband, children. She's not after the world.
>
> SUSANNAH. She'd better be, or she'll end up like your Mum and mine . . . vicious. You bloody exploitative shit. I hope it rots off. (186)

Frank's claim that Crystal doesn't want the world reveals more about his own wants than about the women's. Frank doesn't feel threatened by Crystal; Susannah wanted too much, failing to give up her public life when he wanted her attention. His belief that Crystal doesn't want the world suggests that, despite his socialist leanings, Frank believes that the middle-class, educated Susannah has different, and more unconventional, aspirations than his working-class wife. Furthermore, his perception of the roles of wife and mother as natural desires for working-class women such as Crystal reinforces traditional gender divisions and power structures.

After Susannah leaves, Crystal lives up to the image of malleable wife. She uses sex to reclaim Frank because she feels threatened by Susannah's presence.

> CRYSTAL. She gone? . . . Smell me.
>
> FRANK (*grabbing her and burying his face.*). Mmmmm . . .

CRYSTAL. Guess what it is . . . no, you got to guess . . .

FRANK. It's called 'Expensive'.

CRYSTAL (*laughing*). You ain't seen nothing. (*She drops the dressing gown. She is wearing very little, but it is sensational.*)

FRANK. Christ!

CRYSTAL. Thought I better do something.

FRANK. No need.

CRYSTAL. Really?

FRANK. Look, it's old history.

CRYSTAL. I started to feel like, you know, a fucking gooseberry in me own place. (184-185)

At the end of act one, Frank seems to have the upper hand in his relationship with both women. Furthermore, the two women are established as distinct opposites, whose adherence to or rejection of feminism defines both their choices and their limitations.

Act two is set ten years later. Again Gems illustrates the changes visually through the decor and costumes. Most important are the

signs of children . . . a child's bicycle, toys brimming from a traditional washerwoman's basket . . . FRANK's *working area. It is in sharp contrast to the smart sofa, lamps, and the retro side table with the music centre.* (186)

The fancy furniture and the abundance of toys suggest that Frank and Crystal are

doing well financially. Frank's cluttered work area indicates that he does much of his work at home, and he is probably not responsible for the finery. Crystal's entrance confirms the audience's assumptions. She is dressed fashionably, wearing expensive shoes and carrying a matching bag. She has brought food in with her, take-out. "*During the next scene she takes the food to the kitchen . . . comes and goes, taking a shower, eating a slice of quiche . . . changing her clothes . . . From time to time* FRANK *watches her . . . obviously a familiar ritual*" (186-187). Frank's pointed question, "You going out again?" indicates that there has been a change in their roles in the household, solidifying appearances.

Crystal, who makes the money and spends the money, has become the embodiment of the 1980s materialistic go-getter. She is no longer the working mom struggling with daycare, cooking, and cleaning. In fact, she is free from the children, who are next door with a neighbor, even though Frank is supposed to be watching them. She dismisses Frank's disapproval of the high cost of take-out food, saying, "At least I know they're getting some decent nosh, tell them it's in the fridge. Where are they?" (187). Frank's obvious frustration with his wife's new freewheeling lifestyle continues as they fight about money. Crystal calls for an emergency plumber to fix the hot water because Frank has forgotten to arrange for someone to take care of the problem.

> FRANK. Don't do that! It's thirty quid before they come through the door—I've told you, I've got somebody—

CRYSTAL. Hullo? All-Night Plumbers? Yeah, me again. Yeah, same problem. Could you--? Good . . . They'll be here in half an hour.

FRANK. I'm going out. I thought *you* were going to be in tonight . . . Where you off to, anywhere special?

CRYSTAL. Now, now.

FRANK. What?

CRYSTAL. Listen, love. I don't ask about your things. (187-188)

The exchange reveals the shift in the power dynamics of their relationship not only in terms of who assumes the role of provider, but also in terms of their sexual relationship, as both partners evidently engage in extra-marital activity. Crystal's freedom has expanded considerably.

It seems that Frank's theory that Crystal "doesn't want the world" has blown up in his face as Susannah had predicted. Crystal has, in her own way, become "vicious" in reclaiming her individuality.

FRANK. Crystal, we never see you.

CRYSTAL. Don't tell such lies.

FRANK. This last few weeks . . . They miss you.

CRYSTAL. Oh yes, go on. I'm a rotten mother now.

FRANK. I didn't say that.

CRYSTAL. You can't expect me to stick in every night. *I* want a bit of fun out of life, I won't have it for ever—

FRANK. I'm not trying to stop you . . .

CRYSTAL. I earn it, I gotta right to spend it . . . I'm the one that pays the bills—

FRANK. That's not true.

CRYSTAL. Most of them . . . more than half. Everything in this place is what I've bought . . . (189)

Crystal has finally rebelled against the traditional roles she seemed to previously embrace. Yet her newfound authority is rooted not in an increased awareness of the ways in which those roles are constructed, but in an adoption of the traditionally male role of breadwinner. Her freedom comes mainly from her financial independence.

Susannah's reappearance reveals that she, too, has changed with the times. Yet her transformation is one of resignation rather than redefinition. Susannah, who has been out of the country for several years, calls Frank unexpectedly, and drops in for a visit. Gems's description of her as "*calm, unsmiling, dignified in black*" (192) suggests Susannah's transformation. Her wonderment over the marked absence of challenges to the status quo emerges as she says, "When I left there was confrontation, colour—"

FRANK. Hah.

SUSANNAH. What happened? Where did it go?

FRANK. Very simple. The money ran out . . . We were getting

somewhere . . . And then the Arabs upped the oil—

SUSANNAH. And down fell Jack.

FRANK. Oh yes. And out of the thickets they came. The carrot-and-stick boys, the law-and-order analysts . . . Cold climate. When there's no wage packet or hope of employment . . . Fear works. . .

SUSANNAH. What about North Sea Oil? I thought we were all going to float away on it.

FRANK. Sold off. Good capitalism—talk national, deal international. Sound Tory dogma . . . So much for the right to work. (192-193)

Though clearly disillusioned by the changes of the last ten years, Susannah and Frank seem to be rediscovering their common commitment, both ideologically and romantically.

Their discussion of the increasing class divisions that are resulting from the decreased options for the working class, as well as for women, leads to Susannah's revelation that she feels cheated by the system because she does not have children. She sounds like Fish, from Gems's *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi*, when she says that having a baby is "the only thing I really want to do right now . . . The need to 'give birth' has been rather overwhelming lately. I seem to be somewhat . . . seething with it . . . I want a child before I start getting infertile" (196). Later, she notes that she wants to sit under an apple tree with her children (197), again connecting her to her counterpart in Gems's earlier work. She laments the options feminism gave her,

saying,

> If it weren't for the Pill I'd have been pregnant three times over . . . God, the agony of choice! . . . There's never a good time to have a baby, if you can afford it you're too old, and who needs Marmite sandwiches and little morons for ten years when you're just getting your head together—God, how I envy Crystal! (198)

Susannah no longer believes in changing the world, and her position seems directly linked to her choices about motherhood. Her perspective is different from Frank's because she has made sacrifices that he has not had to make.

Frank's suggestion that Susannah could be a single parent doesn't sit well with Susannah, who views it as a different kind of sacrifice, for both women and children.

> FRANK. Very fashionable now, single parenting.
>
> SUSANNAH. Is that what they call it? Orphaning children? No.
>
> FRANK. The right to choose.
>
> SUSANNAH. Oh, rights! They need their father—there's a right if you like . . . I'm tired of being on my own. It's an over-rated privilege. (198)

Susannah's point is that such choices are superficial because they merely bring with them a different set of limitations.

When Crystal returns, the stark difference between the women resurfaces, but this time Crystal has the upper-hand. She has no problem telling Susannah that she

looks like hell because Susannah no longer poses a threat. Nevertheless, Crystal thinks that Frank is planning to leave her for Susannah. Because she is confident in her ability to provide for herself, however, she does not need to revert to the girlish sex object that she became at the end of act one. In fact, her sexual independence is emphasized by the arrival of her lover, prompting Frank to attack him.

Crystal continues to assert her authority by treating Frank like a child. He threatens to leave, but Crystal reminds him that he will not be able to afford living on his own, further demonstrating the connection between economics and power. Frank's refusal to give in leads Crystal to decide, "If it comes down to it, I'm the one to go. It's your place. Yours and hers. That's how it started. I'll go."

> FRANK. Set you up, has he?
>
> CRYSTAL. You kidding? If I get out of here, I'm finding something decent for me and the kids.
>
> FRANK. You're not taking the kids.
>
> CRYSTAL. I'm not leaving them.
>
> SUSANNAH. Please. I'll go. Obviously I'm the one to go. I can't bear to see him unhappy.
>
> CRYSTAL. Him?! He never even got me a decent house . . . it's all right for me to work me ass off seven days a week . . . we-ell, I'm rubbish, aren't I? (212)

In her review of *Loving Women*, Rosalind Carne writes that Crystal "confronts her

own inadequacies as a wife" (30), but I think she misses the point. Gems's characterizations suggest that Crystal and Frank are both responsible for the inadequacies of their marriage because neither can break out of traditionally defined roles, even if those roles appear to be reversed in the second act. Shifting the power does not result in an adequate balance; it merely perpetuates the problems of the existing structure.

In this way, Gems shows that Susannah is not the only victim of what Elaine Aston calls the "Thatcherite style of 1980s 'free market' feminism" (*Feminist* 24). Like Marlene in *Top Girls*, Crystal has adopted the bourgeois feminist mantle of succeeding in a man's world, on a man's terms. Her focus on work, play, and money, to the detriment of her relationship with her husband and her children, reflect the 1980s emphasis on the drive to succeed as an individual; self-fulfillment in this scenario leaves little room for community. None of the characters has found fulfillment, and the legacies of 1970s feminism and socialism have resulted in new problems rather than workable solutions in the 1980s.

Though Gems has often noted in articles and interviews that playwrights are not in the business of providing answers and that "politics belong on the platform" ("Not" n.p.), in *Loving Women*, more than in any other play, she does, in fact, take a step towards making a proposal, presenting a solution. In his review of the play, Robert Hewison writes, "Pam Gems has written the first feminist anti-feminist play" (41), which, though it sounds tongue-in-cheek, succinctly summarizes the

complicated politics of the piece, which emerge not only through content, but also through form. Gems's characterization of the political activists Frank and Susannah as at best naive idealists and at worst hypocritical classists, pokes fun at the "trendy left" (Wandor, *Carry* 163). Similarly, the depiction of Susannah's clear frustration over the effects on her personal life of being "the heroine of the revolution" (197) produces a similar satirizing of the feminist movement. Yet because the plot takes an unexpected turn, and the love triangle is resolved in an unusual way, *Loving Women* reads not as a dismissal of socialist and feminist ideals, but as a critique of the flawed pursuit of those ideals that has failed to expand its imagination by exploding existing social structures, and has, instead, simply tried to patch over those structures.

Gems begins to disrupt the traditional comic structure as the two women begin to unite. Crystal proposes an unusual arrangement in which all three of them, and the two children, could share a house together. She points out to her husband, "I mean, let's face it, love, it's OK in bed but I bore the tits off you when I open me mouth . . . sometimes I don't but that's because I act up and make you laugh. Only you don't always feel like playing Betty Boop" (212). By having Crystal recognize the limitations of her relationship with Frank, Gems allows for greater female solidarity than she did in *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi.* The women arrive at a solution without the man's input, and it is one that will serve them all. By living as an expanded family unit, Crystal can keep her freedom and her children, Susannah gets Frank and children, Frank keeps his kids, and the children have a larger family rather than a

split one.

Frank's continued resistance to the idea, however, reflects the difficulty that such a radical proposal faces. He cannot let go of his concept of a traditional marriage; he says, "We have created a marriage . . . there are your parents, my parents . . . there are facts and truths and values here . . . I'm not prepared to overturn, not just *my* life" (214). He threatens to kill himself and the children rather than allow Crystal to break up the family, and Crystal says, "It's what it's all about. What it's always been about. Watch it, Susannah. They're not going to change" (215), indicating the ways in which those in control inevitably resist changes that result in a more equal balance of power. Nevertheless, Susannah and Crystal come together after Frank leaves to discuss the details of the proposed arrangement. The play ends with the two women gossiping and giggling over drinks, suggesting the possibility for new configurations of the family, even if Frank refuses to join in.

Irving Wardle writes, "The gap [from the 1970s to the 1980s] enables Ms. Gems to editorialize on the state of the nation, and to repeat her warning to feminists who deny their biology" (16). Yet Wardle diminishes the complexity of Gems's message by suggesting that she has but "one warning" to give to feminists. The play is not so much a warning as it is a call for the recognition of an issue that was central to women of the period coupled with an assessment of the lack of progress made in the area of accommodations and the facilitation of negotiating the worlds of motherhood and work outside the home. Gems says about the play, "the

main thing . . . in the end, that interested me, was new ways of living. New ways, because we haven't found any way you see, dismissed marriage . . . It wasn't the fashion. But nothing better has replaced it, in fact, it's much worse" (qtd. in Carlson, *Women* 188).

Conclusion

In *Loving Women*, Pam Gems imagines a new kind of family and provides a space for the coming together of women with different ideologies. Here, the sense of sisterhood emerges in a way that it did not in *Dusa*. In contrast, Caryl Churchill paints a bleaker picture in *Top Girls*, exploding the notion of coming together, as the literal sisters Joyce and Marlene cannot find a space that accommodates them both. Their differences seem irreconcilable, particularly with Joyce's rejection of Marlene in the final scene:

> MARLENE. But we're friends anyway.
>
> JOYCE. I don't think so, no. (98)

There is no comic ending in *Top Girls*, nor is there any prescription for solving the deep rift between the characters or the members of society that they represent. The final image, Angie's disoriented entrance and her assessment of the "frightening" reality to which she has awoken, offers the audience a challenge that is different from Gems's Crystal and Susannah giggling over cocktails as they map out their plan for the future.

In the 1980s, British culture continued to valorize the individual to the point

of self-absorption. Churchill's and Gems's plays at the beginning of the decade examine this shift and critique the resulting loss of the sense of community that had flourished at the beginning of the 1970s. By setting their plays very firmly in the time and place of their original production, Churchill and Gems create striking histories that challenge audiences to look more closely at their own role in the production of history.

As the culture became more conventional, Churchill's and Gems's plays became more conventional on the surface, but simultaneously more radical. The dramatic and thematic effectiveness is in making the plays appear to be one thing and then showing them to be something else. By toying with the conventions of realism, the playwrights achieve a Brechtian alienation that "consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected" (Brecht 143). In doing so, both plays rupture traditional, conservative structures, which inextricably links them to the time and place of their production. In this way, both playwrights encourage the audience to look beneath the surface of their own comfortable, conservative, 1980s society. Drawing people in with a comfortable form, these plays are not as obviously antagonistic as earlier works such as *Vinegar Tom* and *Arthur & Guinevere*. Yet though they are not as disruptive on the face of it, they are ultimately more so as a result.[43]

Conclusion

Historically, political and social attitudes towards mothers and motherhood have been fraught with contradictions. In her 1994 book *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*, Shari L. Thurer provides an overview of cultural constructions of motherhood in Western societies spanning several centuries, with sections ranging from "Cavemother: Old Stone Age Mom" to "Reinventing the Myth: 1980-1990s." In the introduction to her book Thurer notes that

> just as the practice of mothering has veered widely within the mores of different epochs, so has the status of mothers . . . as men realized their contribution to procreation and seized control, organizing much of what we know as mainstream history, the mother has been dehumanized, that is, either wildly idealized (with mothers becoming prisoners of their own symbolic inflation) or degraded . . . (xxvi)

Such "dehumanization" contributes to constructions of a concept of motherhood that is symbolic in that "motherhood" represents a set of ideals that exists outside of many women's actual experience.

In their plays written between 1976 and 1984, Churchill and Gems challenge such stereotypes by rehumanizing mothers in a variety of historical contexts, sometimes even challenging the symbolic representations of mothers in mythology and art directly, as in Gems's *Arthur & Guinevere* or Churchill's *Top Girls*. Churchill says, "Playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions. We need to find new

questions, which may help us answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new form" (qtd. in Fitzsimmons 85). The questions that her plays, and Gems's, raised, thematically and structurally, about motherhood and history in the 1970s and 1980s, and the ways in which those questions changed over the course of the decade, are important steps in the evolution of the history play.

In his 1978 essay "The Playwright as Historian," David Hare says, "if you write about now, just today and nothing else, then you seem to be confronting only stasis; but if you begin to describe the movement of history, if you write plays that cover passages of time, then you begin to find a sense of movement, of social change, if you like . . . " (45). In their plays from the 1970s and the early 1980s, Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems describe the movement of various histories in various ways. By connecting the past to the present, whether implicitly or overtly, they expose the production and reproduction of history, and challenge their audiences to examine their own role in that process. In this way, Churchill's and Gems's plays not only suggest a need for social change, but also act as agents of that change. As Pam Gems suggested in 2003, "Drama is not . . . in the business of offering solutions . . . Drama influences. Not frontally, but subtly, through the stratagems of entertainment, through popular engagement" (n.p.).

Both playwrights have continued to expand their examinations of family, motherhood, and history in their plays from 1985 to the present. Continuing to

develop her style of historical biographical plays, Gems examines the conflict between public and private lives as it relates to motherhood and family in plays like *Marlene* (1996), a play about German-born performer Marlene Dietrich that stylistically resembles *Piaf*, and *Stanley* (1996), about the life of English painter Stanley Spencer, one of Gems's rare plays to feature a male protagonist. In *Deborah's Daughter* (1994), a contemporary play set in a north African country that is undergoing a violent regime change, mother-daughter relationships across three (and an impending fourth) generations underscore Gems's multi-layered consideration of globalization, economics, technology, and environmentalism.

Churchill's plays from the mid 1980s to the present have become increasingly experimental structurally in terms of plot, characterization, and language. As a result, her examinations of motherhood and family have become increasingly complex in plays such as *Blue Kettle* and *Heart's Desire* (1997), published jointly as *Blue Heart*, in which temporal and linguistic disruptions interfere with the characters' ability to connect with one another, as parents who have been separated from their children struggle to reconstruct a cohesive family unit to no avail. Family is also at the center of *A Number* (2002), a play featuring only two actors, playing a man and his series of cloned sons, that raises questions about desire, control, and technology. The wife/mother's conspicuous absence in the world of the play—stories about the circumstances of her death change throughout—suggests that women still occupy a space that is outside of existing power structures, as the mother quite literally has no

control over the reproduction of her offspring.

According to Austin E. Quigley, Caryl Churchill's "theatrical imagination is committed more to exploring than to recommending alternatives" (33). In contrast, regarding Gems, Susan Carlson claims that "in most of her . . . plays, Gems is leading a struggle for a feminist drama by pressuring old forms and proposing new ones" ("Revisionary" 116). Whether they have proposed change directly or indirectly, both playwrights have made significant contributions to feminist drama, in terms of both content and form, that have changed, if nothing else, the face of British drama through their provocative expansions of the history play and the ways in which these plays situate motherhood, mothering, and reproduction within their broader examinations of history, gender, class, and power.

NOTES

[1] The character Marguerite is not a mother in Dumas fils's novel or play, though the real-life woman, Alphonsine Duplessis, on whom the character is loosely based did, in fact, have a child (Rudolph, *Revisioning* 298). According to Susan Carlson, "before she knew Duplessis had had a son, Gems had given her Marguerite one" ("Revisionary" 109).

[2] The quality of nurturing can be positive, of course. It is, however, one that has specific gendered associations that mark it as a "feminine" quality that can be detrimental when used as a standard by which to judge women, as well as in its exclusion of men. The problem is not the impulse to nurture but the ways in which the term has come to have a connotation that establishes an ideal to which not all women aspire.

[3] These iconic representations are firmly embedded in the Western cultural consciousness, a fact that ultimately points to the power of and problems with the images of mothers that have been constructed by various forms of media. For discussions of these iconic/archetypal images see, for example, Mary Anne Ferguson, Shari Thurer, and Maxine Margolis. Walters chooses the terms "maternal sacrifice" and "mother-blame" to label these categories (18).

[4] See discussion in chapter 2.

[5] In the beginning of their careers, Churchill's and Gems's work was produced by fringe theatres. Eventually, however, they became just as representative for the 1970s and 1980s as Shelagh Delaney and Ann Jellicoe had for the 1950s and 1960s. One of the reasons I am interested in these particular playwrights is that their work moved from the fringe to the mainstream without a terrific amount of compromise. Gems, for example, was the first female playwright to have work produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company with *Queen Christina* in 1977. *Piaf* was produced by the RSC the following year.

[6] The four novelists who signed on for the project were Margaret Drabble, Shena Mackay, Gillian Freeman, and Maureen Duffy.

[7] The remaining five are Shelagh Delaney, Anne Jellicoe, Liz Lochhead, Louise Page, and Timberlake Wertenbaker.

[8] Of the three plays by Gems that have received Tony nominations, *Stanley* garnered the most, including Best Play of the Year, but won no awards. It is also interesting to note that all of *Piaf*'s nominations in 1981 were in the "play" category rather than "musical," yet in 1999, Gems was nominated as writer in the Book (Musical) category for *Marlene*, a play that on the page seems similar structurally to *Piaf*.

[9] *Owners* (1973), (1993)

Cloud Nine (1981)

Top Girls (1982-British cast), (1983-American cast), (1993)

Fen (1983-British cast), (1984-American cast)

Serious Money (1987)

Ice Cream with Hot Fudge (1990)

Mad Forest (1991)

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire (1991)

Vinegar Tom (1992)

Traps (1993)

The Skriker (1996)

Far Away (2002)

[10] *Cloud Nine* (1981-82) and *Top Girls* (1982-83) for playwriting, and *Serious Money* for "Best New Play" (1987-88).

[11] Other revivals occurred in 1997 (directed by Lawrence Till) and 2000 (directed by Sharrock).

[12] The statistics of the NT2000 list are interesting. "In Autumn 1998 playwrights, actors, directors, journalists and other theatre professionals were asked by the Royal National Theatre in London to nominate ten English language, twentieth century plays that they considered 'significant.' As a result 188 authors were nominated for 377 different plays. Arthur Miller was the most nominated author, closely followed by Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett. The results of this canvassing form the basis of NT2000 -- a year-long Platforms project charting the progress of drama through

the twentieth century, as represented by 100 plays. By including each playwright only once, with their most voted for work, the project aims to present a broad and diverse picture of the last 100 years of theatre" (Royal National Theatre).

Of the "20 Most Selected Playwrights," Churchill tied at number 12 with Edward Bond; she is the only woman in the top 20. Three of her plays, *Top Girls* (16)*, Cloud Nine* (50)*,* and *Serious Money* (75), made the "Most Selected Plays" list. None of Gems's plays made the top 100 listed in the "Most Selected Plays" list, though *Dusa* stands as the play by her that was most often voted for (according to the system they used to determine the final 100 plays). Of the 100 plays in the Platforms series, 15 were written by women.

[13] At the time it was published (1989), Churchill was the only female playwright among the 19 writer-files published in the series. As far as I can tell, she still is. Most of the titles in the *File On* series are currently out of print.

[14] The four in the table are *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Cloud 9*, *Top Girls*, and *Serious Money*.

[15] This passage is from a work by Wandor that was published in 1987. In her entry on Gems in *Contemporary Dramatists*, published in 1988, Wandor writes that one of Gems's "continuing preoccupations" is "the relationship of women to motherhood—fraught and hedged around in the modern world" (191), indicating that Wandor had revised her thoughts on the significance of the topic in Gems's

oeuvre. Yet in her extensively revised version of *Look Back in Gender*, *Post-War British Drama: Looking Back in Gender* (2001), Wandor has edited out her discussions of Gems's work almost entirely, mentioning her only in passing, and providing no discussion of motherhood in Gems's works.

[16] The European title of Hewlett's book is *Baby Hunger*.

[17] The term "career-oriented," and the concept of "career" vs. "job," produces difficult semantic resonance. The way people perceive "careers" often adds to the sense of alienation from feminism that some working class women feel because there is a certain snobbery implied in the distinction.

[18] For example, Penelope Dixon writes, "Feminists usually avoid using the term 'working mothers' in order to raise consciousness that mothers are working when they are home" (109).

[19] Though this list is but a brief sampling, see for example, Margaret Talbot's "Supermom Fictions" in the *New York Times Magazine* 27 Oct. 2002; Lynn Langway's "The Superwoman Squeeze" in *Newsweek* 19 May 1980; Katha Pollitt's "Happy Mother's Day: Subject to Debate" in *The Nation* 28 May 2001; Kathleen Gerson's "Work Without Worry" in the *New York Times* 11 May 2003; Frances Morrell's "Wheels Within the Wheels of Democracy" in *The Guardian* 3 Sept. 1982; Sheila Rowbotham's *The Past is Before Us* (1989); Mia Kellmer Pringle's "New Thinking That

Makes a Woman's Traditional Role a More Attractive Prospect" in *The Times* 14 Jan. 1976; and Hugh Jolly's "Try Taking the Baby to Work" in *The Times* 3 Nov. 1976.

[20] The Act was drafted and passed in 1970, but not put into effect until 1975; "compliance was . . . voluntary until 1975" (Thane 406). The Act was amended in 1983.

[21] *Piaf* was written in 1973 but not produced until 1978. *Queen Christina* was written in 1974/5, and produced in 1977.

[22] The play is an adaptation of Christopher Hill's 1972 history of the same name.

[23] For further discussion of the cultural practice of child abandonment and the ways in which societies provided for abandoned children, see, for example, Shari L. Thurer's *The Myths of Motherhood* or Sarah Blaffer Hrdy's *Mother Nature*.

[24] See Diana Geddes, *Times* 30 Dec 1975:1, and Lorana Sullivan, *Sunday Times* 4 Jan 1976: 3.

[25]Rosa Luxemburg was a Polish-born German revolutionary, co-creator of the pacifist socialist Spartacus League in 1916; she was assassinated in 1918.

[26]Also in 1976, Gems's *My Name is Rosa Luxemburg*, an adaptation of a play by Marianne Auricoste, was produced in London.

[27] Day nursery.

[28] Of course, arguments for and against daycare continue to surface. For example, some say it is bad for the children, as it makes them aggressive or hinders their

identification with their parents (especially their mothers), while others argue that it is good for children's socialization and independence. Daycare is also expensive, sometimes to the point of making staying home with the children a more fiscally sound plan for some mothers or fathers, which creates special challenges in single-parent households. But the point is that if the services are provided at an affordable rate, or for free, then working parents can manage their duties more efficiently. The demand for affordable, or even free, daycare was a particularly high profile cause in Great Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, and continues to be in the present.

[29] This play is cited as *Guinevere* by both Catherine Itzin and Michelene Wandor, and was reviewed in 1976 as *Guinevere* by Michael Billington. Yet the copy I received from Gems is titled *Arthur & Guinevere*, and Gems's literary agent referred to it as such. Furthermore, Gems's own description of the piece, quoted later in this chapter, indicates that she considers both characters central to the themes of the play. Therefore, I think it is important to include both characters' names in the title.

[30] Eileen Fairweather defines the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in her article "Don't You Know There's a War Going On?": "The [RUC is] the Northern Irish police force. It is backed up by the part-timers of the Ulster Defence Regiment; both forces are armed, and almost 100% Protestant. They have several times led, aided or simply turned a blind eye to Loyalist attacks upon the Catholic minority. Part of Britain's present 'Ulsterisation' policy is to tone down the Army's

involvement and put the RUC back into the front line--as a police force, which is, supposedly, 'acceptable to both communities'" (19).

[31] This act eliminated, for instance, the right to a jury trial. "Evidence is heard by one judge alone . . . [trials] sometimes last[ing] no more than 25 minutes. And there have been numerous cases of prisoners appearing in court undefended, because they have not been allowed to see a solicitor" (Fairweather 22).

[32] For other examples, see Mary Rosemary Atkins's 1978 article "The 21 Women Who Broke the Sex Barrier," discussed in detail in chapter 4; "Pro-Feminine Group to Fight 'Lib Perversion" *Daily Telegraph* 2 Feb. 1979: 3; or Mary Kenny's "'Women's Lib' Loses Its Way . . . So I'm a Drop-out" *Daily Telegraph* 10 Dec. 1978: 12. Kenny's column presents a particularly narrow, and hostile, characterization of feminism. Lamenting what she perceives to be the movement's growing distance from "the cultural expansion of the characteristics most deeply associated with women: peace . . . spirituality . . . [and] imagination," she writes that "Women's Lib [is] about the rights of prostitutes, the automatic support of 'gay' liberation, the unfeeling use of abortion as a 'right' to which only the woman has access . . . 'Feminism,' in its current manifestation, is now Marxist inclined and partly pornographic" (12).

[33] Though both plays were first written in the early 1970s, I have chosen to examine them in the context of the time of their original productions in the late 1970s. The

journey of *Queen Christina* from page to stage was not an easy one according to Gems. The play had originally been commissioned by the playwright Ann Jellicoe, who was at the time literary manager at the Royal Court (Aston, "Pam Gems" 159). By the time Gems submitted the work, however, Jellicoe had left the Court, and *Queen Christina* was rejected by the two male directors, Robert Kidd and Nicholas Wright, who "said it was too sprawly, too expensive to do and anyway, it would appeal more to women" (Gems qtd. in Wandor, *Carry* 161). Similar versions of this account may also be found in Gems's afterword to *Queen Christina* in *Plays by Women V* and Claire Colvin's interview with Gems, "Earth Mother from Christchurch" in *Plays & Players* 1982.

[34] The actual number of characters may vary depending on how many actors are in the cast. In the cast list for the original production, thirty-two characters are listed, along with the names of the six actors and five actresses, one of them a child, who played them (Gems, *Queen Christina* i-ii). Yet in the cast listing at the beginning of the play, only twenty-five characters are listed by name, with Descartes, Secretary, and Footman all being left off the list, though they do appear as characters in the play (iii). Additionally, the designation of Cardinals is not specific as to how many, though it would have to be at least two. The cast of characters may range from twenty-eight to thirty characters.

[35] The designation of 1880 for the first act and 1980 for the second act of the play is from the American acting edition (Samuel French, 1981) of the play. In the original published script (Pluto Press/Joint Stock, 1979) and in the Revised American Edition (Methuen, 1984), the first act is set in "Victorian times" and the second act in "the present." In *Churchill: Plays One* (Methuen, 1985), the setting of Act One is again "Victorian times," but Act Two is designated specifically as 1979.

[36] Unless otherwise noted, all citations refer to: *Cloud Nine. Plays: One.* By Caryl Churchill. New York: Routledge, 1985. 248-320.

[37] This exchange appears in all versions of the script except for the American acting edition. In that version, the reference to "duty" does not appear.

[38] See Fitzsimmons, *File on Churchill*, pages 54-56.

[39] For examples, see: "£1,220 Award for Sack After Pregnancy." *Daily Telegraph* 4 May 1979: 2; "Broken Baby Pledge Cost Mother's Job." *Daily Telegraph* 21 Apr. 1979: 19; "No-Pregnancy Pledge to Boss Broken." *Daily Telegraph* 12 Jan. 1979: 3; and "No-Baby Pledge Woman Sacked Unfairly." *Daily Telegraph* 2 Feb. 1979: 8.

[40] Though directed by Stafford-Clark, *Top Girls* was not a Joint Stock production. The play was not workshopped, like *Light Shining* . . . and *Cloud Nine*, but there is still a collective model influence evident in the original production choices (typically observed in subsequent productions). Churchill notes that she "wasn't thinking in terms of doubling at all . . . when it came to doing it, partly because it was being

directed by Max Stafford-Clark who . . . likes working in that way, partly financial considerations . . . and partly because it is obviously much more enjoyable for the actors" (qtd. in Truss 9-10). The play is regularly double-cast, and although Churchill does not specify which roles a given actor should perform, there seems to be a penchant for the Dull Gret/Angie and the Isabella Bird/Joyce combinations, perhaps for their inherent symbolic and thematic value. Revivals of the play in 1991, 1997, and 2000 all use this doubling. The 1991 revival was again directed by Max Stafford-Clark, for both stage and television. Original cast members Lesley Manville and Deborah Findlay returned for the production, with Findlay reprising her roles of Mrs. Kidd, Isabella Bird, and Joyce.

[41] For a detailed discussion of issues surrounding the intersections of class, race, and gender as it relates to the testing, development, and dispensation of various forms of birth control, see chapter four of Sheila Rowbotham's *The Past is Before Us*.

[42] The story of Patient Griselda also appears in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and Petrarch's translation of Boccaccio's work into Latin. When Marlene introduces Griselda to the other guests she says, "Griselda's in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer because of her extraordinary marriage" (31).

[43] Of course, reception is not something that can be guaranteed or easily assessed. In her essay "Caryl Churchill and the Politics of Style," Janelle Reinelt writes,

> From a family-value frame of American conservatism, Marlene can be

> seen to stand for all feminists, bringing the play's point of view in the 1990s uncomfortably close to the recent calls for women to stay at home with their children, seeming to support the charges that feminism has failed women by promoting the workplace to the exclusion of marriage and motherhood. Theatrical art makes its meanings within and between the text, the production, and the moment of its reception—all three sides of this triangle contribute to signification. (181)

Though no one can dispute that the play's (or any play's) meaning has shifted over time, I think that the questions the play raised about work, marriage, feminism, and motherhood in 1982 to "redress the emerging political conservatism of its day" still may be seen today as ones that challenge, rather than reaffirm, restrictive social structures.

Regarding *Loving Women,* Susan Carlson argues, "reviewers' praise for the comfort of recognizable forms effectively canceled out the threat of Gems's radical conclusion" (Carlson, *Women* 189). Though I think Carlson's observation is accurate in terms of the play's original reception—for example, John Barber writes, "It is a long time since I saw a new comedy which delighted me as much as Pam Gems's 'Loving Women'" ("Tonic" 15)—I also think that the play's ending can effectively communicate Gems's radical proposition.

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